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A BALLROOM REPENTANCE

A

BALLROOM REPENTANCE

BY

ANNIE EDWARDES

AUTHOR OF "ARCHIE LOVELL," "OUGHT WE TO VISIT HER?"
ETC.

IN TWO VOLS.

VOL. II.



LONDON

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A BALLROOM REPENTANCE.

CHAPTER I.

IN LUCK.

“FAITES votre jeu. Messieurs, le jeu est fait.”

Trente-et-quarante, as the readers of witty Carle des Perrières know, stands first in the regard of men who solicit fortune, oftentimes who find ruin, by the shortest road.

At roulette, a modest speculator may put down his five-franc piece and, losing it, depart. At trente-et-quarante it is a rigorous law that the stake be of gold. Roulette is the favourite game of the passing crowd—the larger number of the players, indeed, stand while they stake; the favourite game of ladies,

of very young men, of Spaniards and Italians ; a kind of lottery, abounding in frivolous excitement and surprise, but inferior, say competent judges, as regards the poignancy of its hopes and fears to trente-et-quarante.

Has not Monsieur Carle written of trente-et-quarante that it is the most perfect " machine à émotion " to which civilisation, standing on the last steps of time, has reached ?

About twenty players are seated around the table at which Roger Tryan, with the tired air of a man who is at heart no gambler, stakes his napoleons. The majority of these persons are absorbed in the immediate fall of the cards. A few, with hands clasped above their foreheads, are painfully studying mysterious sets of tablets that lie beside them ; greasy sibylline leaves, upon which pathetically long labyrinths of pin-pricks denote the supposed progress of the game's chances.

The green cloth is covered with rouleaux

and Bank of France notes. Not a sound is to be heard but the rippling breeze among roses and orange boughs outside, and the unmoved, mechanical voice of Paul Joseph, the dealer.

“Faites le jeu. Messieurs, le jeu est fait. L’or va aux rouleaux. Tout va aux billets. Tout va à la masse. Rien ne va plus.”

After this official “Rien ne va plus,” there comes a sufficiently long pause. Then, with stolid indifference, the dealer in succession calls out the two scores aloud :

“Huit. Quatre. Rouge gagne. Couleur perd.”

And down fall the rakes, drawing in rouleaux, napoleons, notes, with fine professional catholicity to the winning-table.

A pile of gold lies at Roger Tryan’s side. The bystanding spectators begin to watch him narrowly. Some, even, of his fellow-players glance towards his winnings with an approach at interest.

"You are in luck—little Paul Joseph is dealing," whispers Mrs. Pinto across his shoulder. For Nessie, deserting Sir Dyse Tottenham and roulette, has made her way to the trente-et-quarante. "You are in luck, and I—am bankrupt. Dear, childish, old Sir Dyse insisted upon staking for me, and of course lost everything. I could only make my escape by promising to dance with him (not a waltz, I trust) at our pension ball to-night."

"Take my place, Mrs. Pinto," says Tryan, rising. "Take my place, and make free use of my gains. Nay," as she enacts a show of very feeble remonstrance, "I will accept no denial. Cards delight me not at any time. I am less in the humour for them than usual to-night. You promised before we left Nice that I should be your banker. Profit by the good fortune—rare enough as you know—that has befallen me."

But Nessie Pinto's gods, if gods she have,

are unpropitious. The dealing of Paul Joseph, the wearing of her hempen amulet, the utilising of Roger's winnings, avail her not.

The heap of gold melts away. More gold out of Mr. Tryan's pocket melts away. He produces notes, solid Bank of France notes, at Mrs. Pinto's bidding. They vanish.

Joyce Dormer, a sad spectator of it all, in her young heart understanding but half she looks upon, feels her spirit sink.

"You were only too right, mother," she whispers, moving back from the table with a shudder. "Monte Carlo might yield inspiration to genius, never to me. My dream of outrivalling Schumann is over; I am ready to leave at once if—if——"

But here the poor girl's speech fails her for sudden terror. Stretching out her hand, as she believed, towards Mrs. Dormer, Joyce has rested it, with trembling pressure, on the arm of a stranger, a fiercely-moustachioed foreigner,

brilliant to excess, as regards his waistcoat buttons and sleeve-links, and who returns her glance with a coarse, cynically familiar smile that turns her blood cold.

A branch of Austrian royalty is spending the winter for quasi-bronchial reasons at Mentone. The branch and suite, just one minute before this juncture, entered the Monte Carlo gambling-rooms, and in the spasmodic contagious movement of the crowd, gamblers and non-gamblers, alike eager to gaze upon a not too noteworthy Bourbon profile, Joyce's mother and the poet have been swept away from her.

Far distant, and at each instant receding farther, she sees the leonine white locks of Filippo Filippo, the topmost fluttering bow of ribbon in a Jane Austen hat. Near at hand, where protection is needed most, are over-brilliant complexions, bisted eyes, the croupiers' impassive faces, and (horribly worse than all) the stranger upon whose coat-sleeve

her hand during the space of a few inadvertent seconds has rested.

That stranger is he who calls himself "Count" Zecca, the Fighting Fitz-Gerald of the district, a *table d'hôte* nobleman, whose taper fingers are celebrated for their throws with the dice, their artistic neatness in turning opportune kings at *écarté*. A duellist, whose shameless proficiency in his calling has become a bye-word. A Frenchman, born in Mauritius, brought up in the Brazils—put upon oath, could Zecca give reliable evidence as to his own nationality? An adventurer—let us call things by their names—an adventurer, a suspected card-sharper, a bully; and withal a man who, at Monte Carlo, holds his head aloft in the crowd! A man whose enmity few men and fewer women would be rash enough wantonly to court.

In respect of the next five or six minutes Joyce's vision, to this hour, remains confused.

She knows that Count Zecca, with a look and tone that stopped her heart-beats, turned and spoke to her. She knows that, although the gaslights began to dance wildly before her sight, she gave Count Zecca an answer in faultlessly grammatical French, and with a pointed brevity which caused his sallow cheeks to redden. She remembers catching Nessie Pinto's eyes fixed upon her, a look of cool triumph in their black depths; remembers hearing a stifled burst of Nessie Pinto's laughter, and then . . .

Then, Joyce's clear recollections are of an English arm making swift approach through the crowd; of a foreign Count, waistcoat buttons, sleeve-links, and moustachios, sent forcibly into nothingness; of reassuring whispers from a well-beloved familiar voice; of a struggle through the densely-packed outer vestibule; finally of standing in the cool, pure night alone, on the fairest terrace in Europe, with Roger Tryan!

CHAPTER II.

OUR PATHS LIE APART.

FOR a while they keep rigidly to commonplace. So many generations of artifice live in our fibres that at any crisis of strong feeling modern men and women instinctively fall back upon the dulcet inanities, use language to hide, rather than set forth, their emotion.

"I recognised you, Miss Dormer," says Tryan at length, "just when you, unluckily, got divided from your party. Nothing harder, really, than for people to keep together in these crowded rooms."

"And the Frenchman at whose side I stood was a stranger—I hope you understand that," cries Joyce quickly. "I touched his

arm with my hand, thinking mamma was still there, and he spoke to me. I am afraid my answer was too much seasoned with British pugnacity for French taste."

A blush, painful in its intenseness, over-spreads Joyce Dormer's cheek.

"Do not trouble yourself on the score of pugnacity. If explanation is needed, Count Zecca can get it from me. He is a man accustomed to explanations."

Roger Tryan speaks lightly, but with a different significance underlying his reply to anything of which Joyce Dormer dreams.

"What, was the Frenchman you put aside a friend of yours?" she exclaims. "Apologise to him, Mr. Tryan, pray, if you find that he was affronted by my brusqueness."

"Count Zecca is—no, I cannot boast that I have the honour of the Count's friendship! But depend upon it," says Roger Tryan, "he will not take your rebuff too seriously! The

hangers-on at Monte Carlo, men like Zecca and myself, are happily not overburthened with sensitiveness, whatever our other failings may be."

"Hangers-on! If you knew how I hate to hear you class yourself among such people!"

The words break from Joyce's lips ere she can reflect upon the perilous extent to which she may be committed by them.

"Are you speaking in earnest, Miss Dormer? Do you still take interest enough—can you still be pained, in any way, by such a subject?"

At his tone her heart takes alarm. She remembers the thinness of the ice upon which both of them stand.

"It is late . . . I think, Mr. Tryan, the prudent thing would be to return . . . to search round the rooms for mamma."

As she stammers this, she half withdraws her hand from Roger Tryan's arm, then stops

short. He bethinks him of her attitude, her face at the moment when he asked her, nearly three years ago, to be his wife!

"The prudent thing for you, or for her? Is Mrs. Dormer afraid to trust you for a short ten minutes out of her sight?"

"Mamma has never known the sensation of fear yet. Have you forgotten our characters so completely as to accuse either of us of want of courage?"

"Then I see nothing to hinder your walking with me to the end of this terrace; Mrs. Dormer has an escort——"

"Our dear old poet, Filippo Filippi—yes, my mother is in good hands."

"And cannot possibly leave the Casino without your seeing her. Surely, Miss Dormer, you need not grudge me my ten or twelve minutes of unexpected good-fortune," he goes on, pleadingly. "Do you not remember how, in our old London days, a hundred years ago,

you used to declare that the dances we never reckoned on—not those lawfully set down in the programme—were the ones best worth dancing?”

“Unfortunately—I mean, one may have said many foolish things in one’s youth—I mean, these are not our old London days of a hundred years ago——”

The sentiment which gives birth to these disjointed remarks is worthy of a Hannah More. Quite honestly Joyce essays to put on looks of wisdom, tones of indifference, a manner of chill and absolute repulsion. And Roger Tryan, scanning her face—a page, clear, transparent as ever to his perusal—is not repulsed. Taking the hand that the girl has already half-withheld from him, Roger Tryan draws it firmly within his arm, then leads her away under shadow of the friendly palms and eucalyptus that overhang the terrace.

He is a man whose best chances of life are

past and done with, forfeited, say his friends, by a Quixoticism that the world's approval has scantily endorsed! And Nessie Pinto, under the gas-lamps yonder, is making ducks and drakes of his money, as she, or Major Pinto, or others like unto them, may do with more of it to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow! And the woman he loves is lost. Joyce Dormer, bought at a price, will, he doubts not, in a couple more months, have pledged irrevocable faith and obedience before the altar to John Farintyre.

. . . But these present ten minutes, this actual, tangible snatch of good, Roger Tryan resolves to make the most of. Arbitrary divisions and subdivisions of time do not exist, it is said, when men's brains are at tension-point. Ten minutes! Why, the Parisian hashisch-eater walking one evening down the Passage of the Opera judged, from his sensations, that the walk must have lasted two

years. Who shall say that the ideal of a lifetime's happiness may not, under the influence of a more potent intoxication than hashisch, be compressed into such a meeting as this?

"In the first place, let me have a long look at you, Miss Dormer. You have grown, I think," his eyes resting with loving scrutiny on her fair, tall figure. "But your cheeks are less dimpled, have a trifle less colour in them than of old. Are you strong?"

At the remembered kindness of his look, his tone, Joyce Dormer's self-control all but gives way. A guilty, choking sensation rises in her throat.

"I am much too old to grow, Mr. Tryan. You forget my age, of course? I shall be twenty-one next April. As to looking thin—my mother and I spent last autumn in Switzerland, and I fancy we walked ourselves into good condition. Dimples, as often as not, you know, arise from want of exercise. I am

as strong as any giant. I daresay I shall live to be a hundred."

And in confirmation of her giant's strength, Joyce breaks down with a sigh that is half a sob. She turns her face wearily aside.

"Twenty-one in April," repeats Roger Tryan, after a pause. "Yes, your birthday comes on the thirtieth, just in time for the first roses. Do you remember——"

"The birthday I was eighteen," she interrupts, "and your gift to me! Considering that my Stradiuarius is in my hands every day—every hour, almost—of my life, I am not likely to forget it."

"How shamefully I teased you about your violin! If other trades failed, it was decided we should frequent fairs and racecourses, if you remember, and when the performance was over you were to go round, wearing spangles and a velvet cap, and with a little tin mug for halfpence."

"I was young in those days, Mr. Tryan. One can jest with such a light conscience at eighteen!"

"But now you play, I am told, like an artist. Coming across old acquaintance, I hear of you sometimes, Miss Dormer, when——"

When the Pinto policy of isolation does not succeed in keeping him and the old acquaintance apart.

Joyce Dormer's heart turns to ice.

"No doubt these same acquaintance have enlightened you as to other matters beside my violin playing."

She asks the question with unreflecting eagerness, her face uplifted to his.

"Yes, I have been enlightened," Tryan answers gravely. "Once or twice I have thought of writing to Mrs. Dormer, of offering my good wishes and congratulations, but, somehow, each time my strength of mind failed me. Although we have given up correspond-

ing, there can be no crime in looking upon each other as friends, still, Joyce—I would say, Miss Dormer ? ”

“ Friends ! ”

She murmurs the word under her breath, and with an involuntary movement of the fingers that touch his arm.

“ But our paths lie apart, do they not ? So utterly apart, that for all chances of meeting, one of us might as well inhabit the Antipodes. Well, well, I suppose these things are written,—no use to kick against the pricks. Some one who shall be nameless is a lucky fellow.”

This last remark comes out after a very full stop indeed, and with an obvious effort.

“ Do you think any human being should be pronounced lucky till he dies ? ” cries Joyce, with a futile attempt at speaking playfully. “ The pessimists who call life a bad joke that does not signify are in the right, depend upon it.”

"You did not think so always. Life, to both of us, seemed the reverse of a bad joke once," observes Roger Tryan.

The meaning conveyed by his tone is unmistakable. Joyce knows that the hour of explanation for which she has so longed is at hand. Woman-like, her instinct is to escape from it by flight!

"I am afraid, Mr. Tryan, delightful though the night is, that I must ask you to take me back. This coming to Monte Carlo was altogether a whim of mine," she adds. Could Roger Tryan but know in what wild hope that whim had birth! "It would be cruel to victimise my mother and Filippo any longer. Mamma wishes to return to Nice by the nine o'clock train. I really must look after her."

"Mrs. Dormer will look after you. Do not be in any fear on that head. Joyce, my dear"—after this abrupt fashion does Mr.

Tryan send conventional reserve to the winds—"is the last rumour about your affairs reliable? Is Mr. Farintyre to follow you to Rome, at Easter?"

Joyce's answer is given with loyal promptness. But tears are in her voice; no effort of will can hinder her tongue from stammering.

"Rumour for once has spoken true. I am guided by my mother's wishes—and Mr. Farintyre's. My mother, of course, knows best—there is no particular good in long engagements, is there?"

But of this matter Roger Tryan refuses to be a judge. He remembers a time when he was engaged himself, far back in his youth. It was the brightest time of his life, and came to a close only too soon.

"If people are happy," observes Joyce profoundly, but growing more and more confused, "if people care a great deal for each other, I daresay it matters little whether they

remain engaged or are married. The world is good to them either way."

"And when people 'care a great deal for each other' and the world separates them—what then?"

. She turns from him in mute pain. The quiet of the night is profound; a quiet broken at long intervals by some swirl of wind among the palm branches, or the dull beat of the waveless Mediterranean far below.

"And when people care for each other and are condemned to live asunder—what then?"

Roger Tryan's voice sinks, as he repeats the question, to a whisper.

"Each had better lie at peace, cold and unknowing, in the grave," Joyce answers, with a burst of pent-up emotion. "I have felt *that* for a very long time past. Better find rest in one's youth, before one has forgotten the taste of happiness, than labour along a desert road for thirty or forty years!"

As the words die on her lips they reach the extremity of the terrace: from this a flight of broad marble steps leads down, through moonless glooms of tulip, acacia, and eucalyptus trees, to a lower stretch of garden. A minute's hesitation, a glance in the quarter whence Mrs. Dormer and Filippo may reasonably be looked for, and the lovers "who never must love more" descend. A minute more, and they are as much alone as though a hundred leagues divided them from glare of gas and clink of gold, from rakes, rouleaux, croupiers' cries, and the hard black eyes, the mocking cynical laughter, of Nessie Pinto.

Moved by some quick instinct of shyness, Joyce Dormer frees herself from Tryan's arm, and walks a pace or two away. Then she turns, and holding her hands upon her heart to still its beating, looks at her former sweetheart, with steadfast gaze.

He has aged over-early—aged more than

their two-years-and-a-half of separation should warrant. This is all the change Joyce can discover in him. The features, the brow, are delicate, the expression is honestly open as in the days when Roger Tryan, "the most popular speculation of the season, the handsomest fellow about town," first took her girlish heart by storm. If, according to Mrs. Dormer's theory, the hue of the plant becomes attuned to that of its surroundings ; if a man, amidst coarse associates, must perforce be in a state of moral decadence, the process of degeneration makes itself visible by no outward or visible sign in Roger Tryan. The poppy retains its surface whiteness. The man approaches our ruined cousins the Ascidians, by steps, as yet, imperceptible.

"I have given up the wearing of lavender gloves, Miss Dormer ; my coat savours not of Bond Street ; a dark suspicion of poverty and Bohemianism hangs about my presence. You

see I have the faculty, as in the days that are dead, of divining your thoughts."

Sweetest womanly pity, impossible for her to dissemble, steals into Joyce's manner.

"You are looking older than you ought to look, Roger." The familiar Christian name *will* force its way, unnoticed by them both. "Your temples are worn. As I watched you bending over the cards at that horrible gambling-table, it seemed to me that you are growing ever so little gray. Ah, heaven," she adds piteously, "what life is this we lead, we nineteenth century people, that we lose our youth before we rightly know what youth is!"

"I finished with youth two years and a half ago," says Tryan. "I shall be eight-and-twenty this spring. At eight-and-twenty a man should be wise, whether his hair happen to have turned gray or not. My birthday, if you recollect, comes close upon yours. 'Seven years! exactly the right difference between

you two dear children,' Mrs. Dormer used to say, looking at us with fond maternal pride."

"Mr. Tryan, is this generous? At the point where you and I stand now, can good come to either of us by going back to happier, better days?"

"Happier—better," he repeats, with collected slowness. "If I believed you to be in earnest, not swayed by the light comedy of the moment, I should feel sorry that you used those words. For I love you! Oh, no need to turn your head away. Mrs. Dormer, Lady Joan Majendie herself might hear the confession. I love you so much that I would rather your future life was untroubled by regrets. Your happiest, best days—or you ought to think so—are to come. It was of your own free-will, remember, that you gave me up in my poverty."

"Roger——"

"Just as it is of your own free-will that

you are taking . . . well, that you are on the road to taking Farintyre in his riches. As well learn or unlearn sufficiently to make the best of him, my poor little friend, for your own sake."

Upon this, Joyce's fortitude breaks down signally. She lifts her hands to her face; a big sob convulses her throat, and in another moment Roger Tryan's arms are around her.

"When I gave you up, when I was persuaded into writing to you as I did, I sinned." She murmurs this with broken, indistinct utterance, her head clasped against his breast. "Yet I think if you had been patient only a little while longer, things might have come straight. I was penitent. I was waiting day by day for a chance of reconciliation when mamma received that crushing letter from Lady Joan Majendie. She had seen you at some German watering-place with congenial

friends, in excellent spirits. And I knew that you had forgotten me."

Absolutely, simply upright is Roger Tryan's answer.

"I have not forgotten you during one waking hour of my life. Wherever I have travelled, whatever my associates have been, your face, my darling, has been before me always. So it will continue to be, I hope—for to me there would be no gain in forgetting past happiness—till the end."

"Yet you never wrote, you never gave me an opportunity of setting myself right in your eyes?"

"I looked upon my sentence as final. I knew that my judges had decided with wisdom not to be questioned," says Roger Tryan.

"You are cruel; but I deserve it. I deserve more than you can say."

Joyce clasps her hands together with a gesture half despair, half entreaty. As she

makes this movement, the only adornment of her sombre dress, a bunch of violets, tied with a loop of crimson filoselle, falls from her throat to the ground.

In a moment the violets are in Roger's possession ; he lifts them, warm and odorous from their resting-place, to his lips.

"I will give them back, or some fresher ones, if you will accept them from me to-morrow. Miss Dormer, will you allow me to call upon you?"

"Yes, Mr. Tryan, I will allow you."

"There are one or two questions to which I should like a plain, straightforward answer. In the first place : is it altogether too late to move for a new trial ? Do not talk to me of your mother's wishes or of Mr. Farintyre's. Are *you* definitely pledged as regards next Easter, or are you not ?"

Low is his voice and well controlled, but the ring of passion is there. It vibrates

through every fibre of Joyce's frame. And still—she vacillates! Her right of action, as the reader knows, is not forfeited, a loophole of freedom remains to her. "If either of us see fit to change between this and April," was the ultimatum delivered to John Farintyre at Clarens, "it shall not be counted as falsehood." And Roger Tryan, full of unchanged love, is at her side, pleads for her answer. Her breast swells wildly with hope; she has only to speak one word for that hope to become reality. And instead of speaking it she vacillates—as many a woman has done when happiness, when life, depended upon a prompt Yes! She remembers her mother, Lady Joan Majendie, the world, and shrinks away.

"Do you ask me these questions in seriousness?" she falters with trembling, clammy lips. "You talk of moving for a new trial. Do the judgments of old days affect you still? You are leading a changed life, Mr. Tryan.

You have new interests, new friends. Impossible that you can owe allegiance to them, yet care what fate awaits me."

"I owe allegiance to no one," says Tryan, without a second's hesitation. "Tell me you are bound in honour, and I withdraw. If I had a shadow—you hear me—a shadow of honest hope that I could win you back, I would follow you to the end of the earth tomorrow. Two years ago," he adds, "you threw me over, wisely, no doubt, all things considered, as the world holds. Yet sometimes I have thought that poverty, neglect, work, sweetened by such love as you and I felt for each other, might have been the better part."

Before the look of pain on his white face, Joyce's last frail barrier, pride, is swept away.

"What do I care for neglect—what do I ask but to work? I have been used to poverty always. I don't want to know the

taste of money. If I could choose, I would sooner spend the rest of my days free of riches than possessing them."

"Joyce, is the power of choice yours still?"

And Tryan has taken firm possession of her hand; her hand is more than half-way upon the road already travelled by the bunch of violets, when Mrs. Dormer, clinging to the arm of Filippo Filippi, appears unexpectedly on the scene.

CHAPTER III.

COUNT ZECCA'S BOAST.

THE night, as I have hinted, is moonless, but the lamps, thickly stationed by a liberal administration along every allée and terrace, render the Monte Carlo gardens clear as day.

Watteau or Boucher might have loved to paint the scene upon which Mrs. Dormer, her maternal heart distraught (the mixed sensations of hope, dread, ruin, possible victory, all compressed into a moment), finds herself forced to look. A scene with a background of purple starlit sea, a middle distance of olive and cypress, a foreground of marble terrace, pencilled fan palms, and orange trees ; item, two figures which, with eloquent grace,

yield the needful touch of human interest to a perfect picture.

For a moment Mrs. Dormer stands still, not so much irresolute, as beset by conflicting resolutions. Then, after a discreet explanatory whisper in the poet's ear, she trips forward alone, a slender hand cordially extended, an admirably well-chosen smile upon her lips, towards Roger Tryan.

I have, before this, chronicled many flattering things of Joyce's mother; in common justice, two clauses horribly the reverse of flattering must be added. Firstly, she never omits a chance of offering her hand to an enemy. Secondly, when she hates you most, she is, in all seasons and places, mistress of a smile.

"How do you *do*, Mr. Tryan? Just for one moment I positively did not remember your face. Two years, alas! work such sad havoc in us all. These charming accidental

encounters make one half believe in Destiny, and still, I fear, it must be a case of how-do-you-do and good-bye. So fortunate, Joyce, love, that you should have met with an old acquaintance; fortunate, too, that you and Mr. Tryan recognised each other in that terrible crowd; now, do you know, we must run—yes, actually run—as fast as our dear Filippo can keep up with us, if we would catch the nine o'clock train.”

And, while she prattles out this little string of accentuated nothings, Mrs. Dormer holds, ay, presses, the hand of the man whose happiness her worldly ambition has ruined. She looks up at Roger Tryan with all her dimples brought into play, with her eyes shining softly under their long lashes.

“I am ready, mamma,” says Joyce, in a heavy, tired voice. The sight of her mother’s face, the sound of her mother’s voice, have borne the poor girl back from intoxication to sober-

ness, from the joys of a faintly possible heaven to the actualities of this everyday world in which she and Mr. John Farintyre have so nearly agreed to "labour along a desert road," yokemates. "As our time is short, I suppose we must say good-night, Mr. Tryan." She gives her hand to her old lover, lapsing, mechanically, into the frozen phrases of mere acquaintanceship. "We are very glad, I am sure, to have come across you again."

"So *very* glad!" echoes Mrs. Dormer, whose speech and manner are more italicised than usual. "You are, I doubt not, making some stay in Nice? Yes. My daughter and myself will, I fear, be going on to Rome immediately. I have been talking about the Riviera climate and my own sleeplessness with Signor Filippi." Had ever woman so many convenient symptoms loyally within call as Mrs. Dormer? "And he thinks—Joyce, dearest, you hear—Filippo Filippi thinks, with me, that

there is no place like Rome for calming overwrought nerves."

Roger Tryan keeps possession of Joyce's hand with valiant disregard of her mother's presence.

"No place like Rome for enabling one to forget oneself," he repeats. "Do you recollect what Hawthorne makes one of his heroines say, Miss Dormer? It was in some book we read together in Cowes, that August! 'I believe that Rome, mere Rome, will crowd everything else out of my heart.'"

"Heaven forbid!" cries Joyce, unconsciously using the exclamation of Hilda's betrothed.

Mrs. Dormer is about to interpose, little approving this exchange of sentiment by quotation. Opportunely, however, Filippo Filippi draws near, looking—his slouched hat in his hand, his cloak drawn around him—like some old Florentine noble, newly alighted on earth

from one of Titian's canvases. Has Filippo in his poet-soul some fine affinity with the lovers, or does the prosaic thought of supper and sleep prompt him to suggest that the ladies must hasten if they would catch their train? Whatever his motive, he engages Mrs. Dormer's attention, drawing her to the nearest lamp to consult the minute-hand of his watch, and Tryan is free to whisper a few eager words in Joyce's ear.

"My question remains unanswered. Is the power of choice yours still?"

"Come to see us," she falters, "and I will tell you."

Tell him! As though the expression of her uplifted eyes were not doing so at this moment.

"At what hour to-morrow will you be at home to me?"

"I shall not leave the house all day. We live at the corner of the Jardin Public——"

"Overlooking the sea. I knew your house before you had been twelve hours in Nice. I have passed it, have looked up at a window I believed might be yours, pretty often during the last two or three evenings. You will see me in good time to-morrow, then, and——"

"My dear Joyce, *will* you have the kindness to make haste?" cries Mrs. Dormer, a ripple of cold displeasure in her voice. "If we miss this train, we shall be forced to return with the crowd an hour later. And of the crowd you and I have surely seen enough! Good-night to you, Mr. Tryan—*good-night*."

And with a lingering hand-pressure, a long, last look, Roger Tryan and Joyce separate, to meet—so Mrs. Dormer in her heart of hearts decides—no more.

Almost the first face Tryan encounters on re-entering the vestibule of the building is

that of Count Zecca, the Monte Carlo Fitz-Gerald.

Not a good face to contemplate at any time is Zecca's. At this moment he is livid to the very lips ; the veins upon his low, ignoble forehead are swollen ; a glare of revengeful fire is in his stealthy, bloodshot eyes.

An ungloved woman's hand, glittering to the knuckles with rings, rests on Zecca's arm. As Roger draws near, the strident tones of Nessie Pinto's voice enlighten him, against his will, as to the subject upon which the pair are conversing.

"Insulty—oh, mong Jew!"

Major Pinto's French, as I have said, is distinguished by more than common idiomatic fluency, although his style be such as a man must naturally acquire among billiard-sharks, book-makers, and stud-grooms. Nessie's is of the 'ighgate 'ill boarding-school, pure and un-

defiled. Like Chaucer's prioress, she speaks French, full fair and fetishly—

“ After the scole of Stratford atte Bow,
The French of Paris is to her unknowe.”

If Nessie have occasion to write a letter in this language, the poor old Major, who never had a grammar lesson in his life, and who spells both English and French phonetically, is forced to execute the task for her.

“ Insulty — oh, mong Jew, Mossieu le Comte, il faut pardonner tout a les amoureux. Ally dong ! La fille avec les yeux bleux, est une ancienne amour, vous savy. Des circonstances sentimentales——”

“Sentimentales? Pardi,” growls the Frenchman, “ dites plutôt——”

But at this point he encounters Roger Tryan's glance, and the sentence, happily, perhaps, for Count Zecca's personal and immediate wellbeing, remains a fragment.

The two men have not even a bowing acquaintance. It has grown to be a tacitly settled thing that Tryan's purse should be, as much as possible, at Major and Mrs. Pinto's disposal, that their travelling-plans should be his plans, their stopping-places his, their amusements his. Here Roger's weakness knows a limit. He has held himself coldly aloof from Major and Mrs. Pinto's associates ; has kept clear of the Captain Blackballs and Count Punters who frequent Monte Carlo, just as in the old days such gentlemen used to frequent Homburg and Baden-Baden ; a miserable, heart-sickening fraternity, among whom Nessie and Nessie's husband stand on the easiest terms of good fellowship.

" Ah, Mr. Tryan, you have come back, then ? Well, I declare, I thought you had deserted me. My last napoleon was dropped — Mr. Tryan nowhere ! And you know how particular Pinto is as to my going about in the

rooms alone. I really had no choice but to accept the Count's escort."

And Mrs. Pinto stops, still leaning on Zecca's arm. She looks back across her shoulder, her face wreathed, poor creature, in the sincerest smiles she has at command, towards Roger. A woman of worse heart, but better breeding, finding herself in an analogous position to this of Nessie's, would know how to support it with grace, would say the right word, look the right look, notwithstanding warranted conviction that the man upon whose arm she leant and the man whose name she spoke might stand to each other in the position of murderer and victim tomorrow. Nessie Pinto must explain, prevaricate, commit herself, court notoriety, at each new change of her life's sorry kaleidoscope.

A dozen units, of varying nationalities, in the crowd, turn at her loud "Mr. Tryan." A dozen pairs of eyes scrutinise the flashy, over-

dressed Englishwoman curiously. They scrutinise the other factors in the group: Roger Tryan, with his fine and chivalrous face, his sweet and lofty courtesy of bearing; Zecca, with his arrogant air, flat skull, and coarsely animal cast of feature; the two singularly contrasted men whom the flashy, over-dressed Englishwoman has brought momentarily into juxtaposition.

"Yes, indeed. You were absent so shamefully long I quite gave you up as my chaperon," repeats Nessie. "What made the case more hopeless was—that I had watched you exit from the scene with Joyce Dormer!"

She pronounces the name archly, with set, premeditated clearness. She interprets aright the effect that name produces on Roger Tryan's expression.

"And, of course, as there was a young lady in the case, I looked upon your desertion of the tables and *I*" (alas for our Anglo-Saxon,

when Nessie makes one of her desperate clutches after a nominative!) "as final. 'Ou revienng toujours à ses premiers amours.' We most of us know the truth of that proverb! However, Count Zecca has promised to give me safe conduct back to Nice."

Roger Tryan bows; accepting his dismissal, as he swallows his disgust, in silence.

"But you must not forget," she cries, her voice growing shriller as the distance widens between them, "that you are engaged to us afterwards. 'The visitors at the Pension Potpourri request the pleasure of Mr. Tryan's company at eleven. Dancing.' Till then, ta-ta!"

And with a succession of friendly nods and smiles, with a salutation airily wafted from her jewelled fingers, Nessie sweeps away; her companion directing a parting glance at Roger Tryan of which more than one spectator in the crowd guesses the sinister import.

It is a boast of the Monte Carlo Fitz-Gerald that he has oftentimes sustained a scratch to honour, despatched his challenge, made his travelling arrangements, and got his man neatly finished within the twelve hours. What are the chances that another name shall not be added to the list of the "neatly finished" before to-morrow's sun be high in heaven !

"The heroic treatment has proved successful," whispers Joyce, when they are about midway along their homeward road to Nice. "We did wisely to visit Monte Carlo, mother. Whatever pain one may have had to bear is past and done with. My heart feels lighter."

"And with change of air and scene will recover its tone altogether," Mrs. Dormer rejoins promptly. "We will start for Rome the day after to-morrow by an early train."

CHAPTER IV.

FIBRES.

“To shorten a long story, you have made a bad night of it, Mrs. Pinto,” remarks the Major moodily. “I don’t see what good is gained by beating about the bush in these matters.”

A solitary candle burns on madame’s untidy dressing-table; for Nessie, though she may stake her friends’ gold with a royal hand at trente-et-quarante, is a keen economist as regards her husband’s weekly bills in the Pension Potpourri. Monsieur, still in his big-checked morning-suit, and with a glass of whisky-and-water beside him, sits with folded arms before the hearth. Mufti the lap-dog,

in a ridiculous attitude of attention, his black locks tied from his forehead with shabby, apple-green ribbons, rolls his eyes cunningly from master to mistress as though expectant of a scene.

The last touch of carmine has been applied to Nessie's cheeks, the last tint of bistre shaded round her eyes. She is appalled in a ball-dress, whose hue and freshness match Mufti's head-gear. Her bleached-gold hair descends in clouds to her eyebrows. Her short, thick-set throat is encircled by brilliants—we will not say of what water. Redolent of essences is her handkerchief, suggestive of kalydors and cosmetics her whole presence. The ill-lighted room, the untidy dressing-table, the shadowed figure of Major Pinto, set off, while they harmonise with, the picture.

“Yes, a deuced bad thing you and your friend Sir Dyse have made of it.” This he repeats as Nessie maintains discreet silence.

“And a deuced bad thing I have been making of it for the last fortnight or more. Unless affairs look up pretty speedily, Mrs. Pinto, the best course you and I can take will be to pack our portmanteaus, persuade Roger Tryan, if we can, to do the same, and depart from Nice, *without* leaving P.P.C's upon our numerous admiring circle of acquaintance. You understand?”

Quitting her dressing-table, Nessie Pinto walks across to the hearth, her silken train rustling so portentously that Mufti, with an air of humiliation, slinks away under his master's chair. She is diligently working a pair of six-and-three-quarter gloves upon a pair of seven-and-three-quarter hands, biding her time over obdurate thumbs and buttons, smoothing the wrinkles out of finger after finger, with the same slow patience that we have remarked as one of her characteristics at the gambling-table. A smile is round Mrs.

Pinto's lips, an expression of amused triumph in her sunken dark eyes.

"Such a queer sort of thing happened to-night, Pinto, at the tables yonder."

She indicates the supposed locality of Monte Carlo with a sidelong gesture of her head.

"Queer sort of things generally do go on in gambling-rooms," says Pinto. "You and I, 'tis clear, do not come to much good there."

"I rather think we were two hundred pounds to the good last winter—yes, and should have remained two hundred pounds to the good if . . . However, we need not hark back upon that old story to - night! You know Count Zecca——"

"Don't you know that I know him?" growls Pinto, "scoundrel and blackleg that he is!"

"Not much worse than his friends, that I ever heard of." Here Nessie may be right.

Of what calibre are the gentlemen who call Count Zecca friend? "Whatever his sins may be," she goes on, "he has one virtue—courage. You will allow so much. He may be a gambler——"

"I dispute it!" In truth, Major Pinto's mood would seem to be one for disputing most things. "When Zecca goes to the club it is to carry away money. We all know that. He makes his first appearance at an hour when other men, flushed with wine, heated by gas, unnerved by losses, begin to play wildly, and stakes his money—with discretion. His best friend never paid Zecca the compliment of calling him a gambler."

"He is not a coward—not a man whom another can insult with impunity," persists Nessie.

"It all depends upon who the other is," Pinto answers contemptuously. "Zecca has eaten as much dirt as most men, in his day."

“He is not disposed to eat any on the present occasion. Roger Tryan, I must tell you, took it into his wise head to have a fracas with Count Zecca to-night, a dozen spectators looking on, and——”

She stops: the gay flow of her narrative cut short by the expression of her husband's suddenly upraised face,

“A fracas before witnesses with Zecca!” exclaims Pinto under his breath. “Roger Tryan must have lost his wits—such hare-brain wits as ever he possessed. A fracas with Zecca means——”

“A duel, or, let us hope, merely a challenge,” interrupts his wife with calmness. “Precisely. That, I fear, is the measure of the entanglement into which poor Roger Tryan has chosen to put his foot.”

Pinto looks at his wife intently. He strokes down his yellow beard with the manner of one rapidly scanning varied contin-

gencies, and seeing no possibility of financial good to himself in any of them.

"Who is she?" he asks at length, in a compressed, odd sort of voice.

Major Pinto evidently holds, with Yuba Bill, that "let a man be hell-bent or heaven-bent, somewhere in his tracks is a woman's feet."

"Who is she?" he repeats, after a minute's dead silence. "Not—not Mrs. Pinto, I hope?"

"Not Mrs. Pinto," cries Nessie artlessly. "My dear old goose, are you so deliciously simple as to think Mr. Tryan would be led into any kind of trouble about poor, obscure, insignificant me? Miss Joyce Dormer, mon cher, the blue-eyed, lackadaisical love of Roger's primrose days, was wandering about the room, and got divided—by accident, we may charitably suppose—from her mamma. Well, not, of course, knowing who she was, it happened that Count Zecca spoke to her."

“Like the double-distilled cad that he is,” observes Major Pinto, only with more emphatic felicity of language than I have transcribed.

A wanderer from life's better paths though this man be, he has fibres still of English manhood left in him — instincts pointing towards an honester lot than it has been given him personally to know.

“Oh, we are going to put on airs of virtue, are we?” cries Nessie, with warmth. “We are going to assert that if a girl with a certain *genre*—and a *genre*, Miss Dormer undeniably has, although I do not admire it——”

“Of course you do not,” Pinto remarks. “You have far too good taste, my dear, to admire Roger Tryan's former sweetheart.”

And Nessie's husband laughs aloud; a harsh, bitter laugh, that causes Mufti to peer forth from his hiding-place, and scan with renewed eagerness the faces of his joint possessors.

"All this nonsense is beside the point. I maintain," cries Nessie, waxing hotter, "that if any English girl, if any young and passably good-looking woman, chooses to loiter about in the salles de jeu at Monte Carlo she must expect unflattering notice. Joyce Dormer was standing beside the trente-et-quarante table, and I was witness of the whole scene. She turned, we may good-naturedly assume, believing her mother was at her side, and addressed Count Zecca,—if my own eyesight can be trusted, laid her hand on his arm. He answered her, no doubt, in the kind of jesting tone ninety-nine men in every hundred would have used—Major Pinto excepted—and in a moment Roger Tryan, like a madman, rushed across the room, and sent the Frenchman flying."

Pinto brings his hand down upon the rickety table with a force that makes his tumbler ring again, and that elicits a short but

sympathetic yelp from Mufti. The dog rolls a suspicious eye towards his mistress, as though to see how this outburst of feeling on her husband's part shall be received by her.

"Well done, Tryan! Sent the Frenchman flying, did he? And served the Frenchman excellently well right. 'Pon my soul," says Pinto, finishing his whisky-and-water at a draught, "I don't believe a man in Monte Carlo, save harebrained Tryan, would have shown so much pluck. Now, the next question is, how will the Frenchman be likely to take it?"

With a quiet, determined effort, Nessie forces the six-and-three-quarter glove to button.

"Ah! There is a question that may concern all of us pretty intimately. You can keep a secret, Pinto, can't you?" she adds playfully, "if I tell you one?"

Major Pinto answers by a nondescript

connubial growl, savouring little of playfulness. He disclaims any desire of becoming Mrs. Pinto's confessor.

. . . "Only just this once! I feel, really, that you *ought* to be told," says Nessie, rising to the higher plane of duty. "After Roger Tryan had performed the act of valour you so much admire, he left the scene in dutiful attendance upon the rescued damsel. I had done play by this time, or rather play had done with me, so Count Zecca and I had a talk together."

"Which must have been improving—to both parties!"

And Major Pinto stares gloomily before him at the fireless hearth.

"Indeed, it so happened that Count Zecca offered me his escort back to Nice. I do not care for the man," admits Nessie with frankness—"I do not care for his society; I knew, however, that if Mrs. and Miss Dormer once held out a

flag of truce there was not much chance of my meeting Roger Tryan again. I also knew you would not like me to be going about alone, and so——”

But here the Major breaks in roughly.

“I am a plain man, Nessie, my dear ; I like a story plainly told. Roger Tryan and that scoundrel Zecca have fallen foul of each other—more’s the pity for Roger Tryan. And Mrs. Pinto — Mrs. Pinto, evidently, used her powers, in vain, as peacemaker. That’s about the time of day, I take it. Don’t let us have ornamentation. Don’t interrupt the charming moral of your tale by idle speculations as to what *I* like, on any subject.”

Mrs. Pinto turns sharply aside ; the muscles around her lips quiver. If aught of good be in poor, world-hardened Nessie, surely it betrays itself at this moment. In some recess of her heart, jealously guarded, lingers so

much love for Major Pinto, still, that she can wince under his sarcasms !

She answers him very low ; bringing out each sentence with an effort.

“ You like plain-speaking, you say. So do I. Too late for Major and Mrs. Pinto to begin ornamenting their discourse. Count Zecca, as I told you, brought me back to Nice—by the merest chance we did not travel in the same carriage with Roger Tryan. He spoke of the unwarrantable rudeness that had been offered him, of the effect such an affront would have on his reputation.”

“ Zecca’s reputation ! Finish with it all, quickly, I say. Why do you hesitate ? ”

“ Well—I fear,” says Nessie, her face still averted from her husband, “ that Zecca is not in a mood to sleep on his wrongs, real or fancied. I may be mistaken, but this is how his talk impressed me. I did my best to conciliate him ; still, I am afraid he means to

act with French promptness, that one of his friends will reach Roger Tryan's hotel almost before Roger Tryan can reach it himself."

Pinto starts up on the instant from his chair.

"If Tryan does the right thing, he will treat the friend in the same spirit as he did the principal. The days of duelling were over half a century ago. Tryan is known for his courage. No man would think the worse of him, or of any other English gentleman, for refusing to put his life in the power of a bully."

"*'Autre pays, autres mœurs,'*" says Nessie, with her accent. "Frenchmen and Englishmen have different codes of honour. If Roger Tryan never meant to stand by his action I see no great bravery in committing it."

"There is the fear—that he will stand by it. Poor Roger has a moral squint, looks at everything from an angle. We know how he

argued himself, before old Tryan's death, into believing madness a virtue! Who shall say he will not turn virtuous now, put himself at Zecca's mercy, perhaps, out of *delicacy*. Kind of high-flown bosh," says Major Pinto ingenuously, "that I never can stand, at any price. However, I shall go to him at once. Right or wrong, sane or insane, I'll see Roger through with it."

He has made a movement in the direction of the door when Nessie's large, tightly-gloved hand is laid upon his shoulder; is laid there with a weight of authority that Pinto knows and bows to.

As a man and a brother, in the qualities commonly called those "of the heart," a superficial judge might rate this broken-down, outlawed Major higher than his wife. Intellectually, by virtue, mainly, of her cooler temperament, Nessie stands above him; at any hour of the twenty-four can, at least, take

sober, not alcoholised views of motive and action. No trifling superiority, as Major Pinto, pretty often, has had practical reason to acknowledge.

Her want of passion, her iced sobriety of judgment, come to the fore now.

"If you follow the best piece of advice ever given you, Pinto, you will keep dark for a while. What good can come of making a dangerous man like Zecca our enemy? If Roger Tryan chose to embroil himself in a quarrel for the sake of his fickle first love, this pale-eyed, baby-faced girl, Joyce Dormer, he is a Don Quixote. *That* he has been, always. No occasion for Major Pinto to turn Don Quixote too."

"Joyce Dormer is an uncommon pretty girl," the Major observes, not over appositely. "And Mrs. Dormer is an uncommon pretty woman. Watched them both from the club windows, yesterday—fellows all wanting to

bet as to which was the mother and which the daughter, and ——,”

Nessie interrupts these reminiscences brusquely.

“Has it ever occurred to you—during the time that has passed since first we met Roger Tryan in Germany—has it ever occurred to you to reckon up the debtor and creditor account between ourselves and him—I mean, roughly, of course?”

Her hold upon Pinto’s arm tightens. She looks with keen meaning straight between his eyes.

“You are silent, yet I thought I made my meaning clear. Have you ever reckoned up the debtor and creditor account between ourselves and Roger Tryan?”

Major Pinto shifts uneasily from this too close contact with his wife’s superior intelligence.

“You are as ’cute in everything to do

with pewter as I am, Nessie. You know the figure of my debts to a shilling. Where's the use of being down on a fellow, like this? Your play at Monte Carlo was to have brought us up, you said, with a run—your unerring system, learned from that Russian fellow you thought so highly of last winter."

"Thanks to my system, I won more than two hundred pounds, honestly, last winter," cries Nessie, with spirit. "Yes, and should have kept them, carried them away in my pocket for the payment of butchers and bakers, if Major Pinto, with all his science, had not lost double the amount at Banco. If I had only had capital to go upon should we be beggars, living in the Pension Potpourri, associating with the people we do, at this moment?"

"I am not imaginative, my dear; I can't fancy Major and Mrs. Pinto in the possession of capital any more than I can see what all this

idle talk about money has got to do with Tryan and Zecca."

"Do you know, Major Pinto," pursues Nessie firmly, "that we are a good deal nearer ruin than usual—that our credit, even in this miserable boarding-house is at its last gasp? Do you know that Roger Tryan could give us a final push in the wrong direction at any moment he chooses?"

"By looking up an old I.O.U. or two unexpectedly. Never! Roger Tryan is not the man to be hard on his friends at a pinch."

Major Pinto's tone, however, has significantly lessened in easy assurance. Such fibres of good as are in him assert themselves with less and less strength; Nessie follows up her advantage briskly.

"Roger Tryan, unadvised, might be as careless of his affairs as ever. How about Roger Tryan, married? Roger Tryan, with a clever, needy mamma-in-law to look into his

money interests and help him on with her advice? I look deeper beneath the veneer of things than you do, Pinto. I have an instinct of coming danger that is seldom wrong. Perhaps you have forgotten my dream in New-market the night before a certain Two-year-old Sweepstakes, the money some people might have made if they had believed in Sir Reginald being scratched?"

Two or three vigorous though scarcely classic expletives betoken that Nessie's forewarnings are still fresh in Major Pinto's mind.

"I have the same kind of dreams now, only this time they are waking ones. Roger Tryan has already made his peace, is so far *lost to self-respect*," says Nessie grandly, "as to have accepted terms from the Dormers. We know, or I know, what the next act in this little genteel comedy is likely to be. Ask your own common sense if he could be those women's friend and ours? Why, do you think

if Roger Tryan were walking beside Joyce Dormer, here, in Nice, that he would recognise Major and Mrs. Pinto in the street ? ”

“ If he did not, it might be the luckiest thing that could happen for Major and Mrs. Pinto,” cries the Major, with a wretched laugh. “ If Roger Tyran would obligingly forget, not only my personal appearance, but the look of my name in writing, it might be about the best stroke of fortune that could happen to me.”

And, crossing over to the hearth, Major Pinto stations himself before the meagre glass that surmounts the yet more meagre mantle-shelf. He arranges the brooch in his gaudy French neck-cloth, arranges the set of his yellow English beard, then, irresolutely, edges his way towards a hat and greatcoat that lie upon a neighbouring chair.

“ Do not forget that you are to figure at the Pension At Home. Our cavaliers are few.

The young ladies will expect you to put in an appearance before we reach the final cotillon."

Beneath downcast lids, Mrs. Pinto's glance follows her husband's movements as she makes the suggestion.

"The young ladies may dance with each other." And by the tone in which Major Pinto speaks, Nessie can guess pretty accurately at the tenor of his decisions. "I'm too old for dancing. I'm not feeling strong. The mistral tries my nerves. A man must be an athlete to trot out three consecutive Miss Skeltons to waltz time, and career through a Lancers or cotillon with their terrible mother as a finish! Besides, if all this you have been telling me is correct," he shrinks from looking in his wife's face; he moves warily towards the door, — "if Tryan has really been absurd enough to get himself into a scrape, I had best, as you say, keep clear of it all until things settle down."

"Nothing can be simpler. I can easily make some excuse to Roger for your non-appearance at the dance, and——"

"If I keep away it is more out of regard for Roger Tryan than myself. Understand *that*, Nessie. I am a man of the world. I don't want either Tryan or myself to be laughed at. How could I back my friend up in any madcap meeting with a cad like Zecca! Of course, if the poor fellow called upon me," says Major Pinto in a moved voice, "I should not refuse to act as his adviser. But it would go against my conscience. It would not square in with my notions of right to make myself a party in any way to such folly."

"The feeling is praiseworthy. Your sentiments do you the highest credit, my dear," says Nessie, accustomed to play dutiful prime minister when Major Pinto's tardy scruples assert themselves, after an imperial fashion. "Unfortunately, it is not permitted, in this

wicked world, for all of us to enjoy the luxury of an elastic conscience. Major Pinto, for his friend's sake, will show the better part of valour, and Mrs. Pinto and Mufti must face things as they come! Nail our colours to the mast, and stick by them, eh, Mufti?"

The dog has leapt up at the sight of Pinto's hat. He licks his master's hand in token of farewell; he listens wistfully as long as Pinto's heavy step can be heard descending the Pension stairs. Then, with true hang-dog mien, with never an attempt at a caress, Mufti slinks to his mistress's side, sits obediently upright on his hind legs while Nessie adjusts his silver chain, gives the last finishing touch to his green satin ribbons; and finally slinks down to the ball-room at her heels.

In past, comparatively honourable days, Mufti, as we have seen, was the chief in a band of performing dogs, the property of a travelling Italian showman, who afterwards,

under the pressure of evil fortune, sold him to Major and Mrs. Pinto. Poor Mufti used to play his rubber, fire pistols, lie dead, yes, and on state occasions, fold his arms and enact Napoleon Bonaparte at Elba. Who shall say that his dog soul is a sheet of blanker paper than the soul of many a biped in broadcloth—that his sense of present humiliation is not sharpened by memories of a better lot!

“O mighty Cæsar, dost thou lie so low—
Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils,
Shrunk to this little measure?”

CHAPTER V.


PENSION POTPOURRI AT HOME.

SOME slight additional burning of colza oil ; some dozen Chinese lamps, precariously suspended, amidst paper roses, across doorways ; a couple of itinerant fiddlers ; white cotton gloves for the dingy fingers of François and Pierre, and the cheap At Home of a cheap Anglo-French Pension is organised.

Mrs. Skelton, in trailing black velvet—cotton-backed—a wreath of flowers in her cap, the fleshless cheeks high rouged, the warranted smile called into fullest play, “receives ;” Nessie Pinto, gorgeous in the apple-green satin to which poor Mufti’s neck-ribbons correspond, acting as aide-de-camp.

The Pension, well named Potpourri, is a dreary, barrack-like building, that stands a mile or more outside the Nice octroi. It is tenanted by such waifs and strays of the invalid Riviera world as are content to accept cross - roads, scorpions, brigands, doubtful mutton, and still more doubtful society, as a set-off to cheapness.

"The Pension Potpourri," says Baedeker, in small italics, "is under British superintendence." Unwary travellers, to their cost, find the assertion true. For the Pension Potpourri is under the superintendence of Mrs. Skelton. The Veteran rules the court, the camp, the grove. By dint of bribes to François and Pierre, the two overworked waiters of the house, she gets her daughters sandwiched in between the more eligible of the bachelors at the dinner-table. Her lynx-eyes inspect, if rumour whisper true, her wiry fingers tamper with, the whole correspondence



of the house. Her snake-like movements, her noiseless tread, pink ribbons and scarlet shawl, infest every floor, every staircase. She haunts the very bureau ; keeps score of breakages and characters alike ; and scans, not only the visitors' cards but the weekly bills of her fellow - lodgers with the punctuality of a detective.

Only when purse - strings have to be drawn does the Skelton family shrink to the rear.

" Let us, ladies, *please*, have nothing to do with financial matters." So the Veteran will plead when the Potpourri pensioners, at her own instigation, talk of giving a ball or getting up theatricals. " We should be sure to launch into foolish little extravagances did we interfere. Let the gentlemen, with their fine business heads, settle francs and centimes among themselves, and look upon us poor, helpless, un-mathematical creatures in the light of ciphers."

By which gentle strategy the gentlemen, whatever the condition of their lungs or their finances, find themselves forced into liberality, while the poor, helpless, un-mathematical creatures are exonerated from subscription.

Mrs. Skelton, with Nessie as aide-de-camp, "receives" such motley assemblage of guests as a pension of a certain class within easy reach of Monte Carlo is likely to gather together. Husbandless wives, the speciality of the region; husband-seeking spinsters, of perfectly safe and certain age; foreign nobles, the main credentials of whose nobility is the bit of ribbon at their button-hole; a batch of circular tourists; hectic poitrinaires, who, upheld by the stalwart arms of the Miss Skeltons, may take a round and a half of a polka, but shake their heads at a waltz; some possible widowers; some shabby-genteel indigenous English; an asthmatic West Indian planter; a dancing chaplain or two; and Sir

Dyse Tottenham. Sir Dyse, persuaded by Nessie's eloquence to return early from Monte Carlo, and whose arrival causes a sensation, so rare is a British title, even the title of an ancient Red Tape Knight, in the Pension Potpourri.

Behold the Veteran flutter, wriggle, circle around Sir Dyse on his entrance, like a little old bantam bound within the magic of a chalk ring! Behold the pathetic importunity with which she puts forth Miss Skelton after Miss Skelton for his approval!

"Dian, my love—Dian, you are not engaged, of course, for the next Lancers. Sir Dyse Tottenham, will you allow me to introduce my second girl? I don't know, Sir Dyse Tottenham, whether you admire the Greek dress?" Pallid, unkempt, Miss Diana Skelton is doing her best to-night to resemble an antique statue. "It has been thought in artistic circles that the chiton somewhat becomes

Diana's cast of features. Pansy, my dear, I have the pleasure of introducing you to Sir Dyse Tottenham." The eye-glass of that venerable Adonis having dropped, discouragingly quickly, after an inspection of poor Diana's bony charms. "Pansy is our home-bird, an English fireside her ideal of earthly happiness. You are familiar, no doubt, Sir Dyse Tottenham, with Auchester? Alas, in brighter, better days!" Mrs. Skelton dusts an imaginary weakness from a stuccoed cheek. "The lamented prebendary . . . a pillar of the Cathedral. . . . All the best church and county society, and—and here is my little Aurora!" Old Sir Dyse, after his introduction to the two elder sisters, showing unmistakable signs of flight. "Aurora, our youngest, the Benjamin of the brood. But for this sad travelling, and the idle ways it gets us into, Aurora would be in the schoolroom still."

And she pursues the same strain—Sir Dyse

having taken quick shelter under Nessie's wing—with dancing chaplains, shabby-genteel residents, red-ribboned nobles, and possible widowers. Without haste, without rest, the frank allurements, as the Gallican expression hath it, of the three Miss Skeltons are set forth by their vigilant mother for the benefit of the crowd.

But Nessie Pinto bears away the laurels of the evening. Nessie is entertaining, posted in the last turf news from England, the last hazardous novelty of the Porte St. Martin, familiar with Monte Carlo gossip, broken in, I had almost said as a matter of daily duty, to the amusing of listeners too bored, too jaded, to search for subjects of interest themselves. Nessie is entertaining. Looking at her from a favourable point of view, forgetting that the apple-green satin, Mufti's ribbons and all, might be fresher, charitably ignoring the part played by art in the working-up of the picture,

Nessie comes within the category of pretty women ; a category from which Mrs. Skelton's girls, despite all frantic efforts at picturesque quaintness, are for ever excluded.


“Charming, very charming, to see such exuberance of spirits, and yet one wishes there were more ballast ; one regrets that poor Mrs. Pinto has never known the responsibilities of a mother.” The Veteran whispers this behind her fan, as Nessie, with Sir Dyse for a partner, prepares to lead off in the Lancers. “We are everything that is kind to her. Living under the same roof, would sisterly forbearance allow one to be otherwise ? But I think it right to say—I should be glad, my dear madam, if you would repeat the fact to others—that I permit no intimacy whatever with my innocent children. When Mrs. Pinto joins the lawn-tennis playing, I consider it my duty to be present. When Major Pinto gives one of his whist parties—and, alas ! there is a class amongst

whom whist means whisky—we retire to our bedrooms. On a wet Sunday, when we are all obliged to go to church together in the Pension omnibus, I try, if possible, to give the conversation *a tone*. At the age of my girls, and with their ignorance of the world, one cannot be too much on one's guard."

Nessie, meanwhile, is dancing her Lancers as gaily as though debt, bankruptcy—ay, and darker things than either—did not stare Major Pinto and herself in the face. Retiring, when the dance is over, to an improvised Eden of paper roses, pink calico, and lamp oil, outside one of the windows, Nessie regales Sir Dyse Tottenham's intellectual palate with refreshment suited to the place and hour; light little made dishes, for the most part, wherein the remains of all her very dear Pension friends are served up, hot and highly seasoned.

"Yonder diminutive, bowing north-countryman and his wife—you see her? the lady clad

in bridal silk, with muscular wrists and a forehead—are a certain newly-married Mr. and Mrs. Peter Magrath, our musical genius and our bore. The bride practises her scales in the public salon, four hours a day. The husband gives us stale republicanism from the *Aberdeen Intelligencer*, and discourses about the music of the future. ‘What is wanted for gude singing,’ says little Magrath, ‘is na’ voice, it is na’ execution, it is na’ harmony. What is wanted is just that which ye hear in my Gerty—sowl!’ The short-haired blonde, in an attitude and a sea-green turban, is a quasi-widow. A delicate constitution and the care of her venerable mother keep her in Europe—within easy reach of Monte Carlo—while her husband, poor fellow, is serving with his ship in China. If my husband were forced to broil under a tropical sun for his country’s sake,” cries Nessie, with one of the little sentimental bursts which, even to herself, seem sincere,



"I would contrive to be somewhere nearer him than the Pension Potpourri in Nice."

"Happy husband!" murmurs Sir Dyse, as he gazes admiringly at the rice-powder on his companion's cheek.

"But whatever we think,—whatever severe things a sense of duty may force us to say of each other,—we are of course very excellent friends on the outside. You can imagine," says Mrs. Pinto, with the easy cynicism that stamps the woman as surely as do her bistre and her rice-powder,—“you can imagine to what extent a dozen ladies living for months under the same roof must love each other.”

"You are conspicuous, all of you, for generosity towards your own sex," answers Sir Dyse Tottenham, "whatever cruelty you may display towards ours."

"Yes, we give no little Italian stabs in the dark," cries Nessie dramatically. "We stoop to no paltry espionage. We are truthful

and just in all our dealings. We extenuate, when we can. We set down naught in malice. I wonder if Mrs. Skelton, our Veteran, has introduced the Three Graces, her daughters, to Sir Dyse Tottenham's notice?"

"A delightful elderly lady, whose name I did not catch, introduced me to three delightful younger ladies," answers the old courtier, with prudent affability.

"To Pansy, the treasure of our hearth—our faithful, home-staying, stocking-knitting Pansy; to Dian, the loved of the Muses; to Aurora, our naughty, wild Aurora, who, in spite," says Nessie, "of her six-and-twenty years, well struck, ought to be in the nursery still."

"Mrs. Skelton and her daughters are evidently intimate friends of Mrs. Pinto's?"

Sir Dyse Tottenham asks the question with a chuckle.

"I am *as* slightly acquainted with the Skelton family as possible," returns Mrs. Pinto,

lowering her eyelids. "Of course, living about in these kinds of places it would be absurd to give oneself airs, and indeed I rather pity the Skelton girls, poor things! They can no more help their terrible mother, than they can help their own want of breeding. All I trust is, we may not come across them in England. You can understand, I am sure, Sir Dyse, among one's own set, among Pinto's people in an English county, it would not do, particularly as we belong to the Conservative interest, to renew such an acquaintance."

Nessie is never more unintentionally diverting than in her moods of ambition, never more palpably out of her depth, and at the same time more volubly loquacious, than when she discourses about county exclusiveness, Our set, Pinto's people, and the Conservative interests of England!

She is still seated under the Chinese lamps, in the improvised pink calico Eden, when

Roger Tryan makes his appearance on the scene. Sir Dyse Tottenham—with his portly figure, his purple face, and dapper little feet, looking exceedingly like a modernised satyr, in evening dress—whispers in her ear. Mufti at her side does chaperon, his black eyes rolling deprecatingly. “Separate me from my position,” those eyes seem mutely to plead. “A dog may be an honest dog, although muddled so deep in fortune’s moat as to wear apple-green bows at a Pension Potpourri At Home.”

Nessie is seated thus, I say, flushed by a certain sense of triumph, laughing aloud over one of old Sir Dyse’s least conventional narratives, when Tryan, a good deal past midnight, enters the ball-room.

Unnoticed himself, Roger stands still: for the space of several minutes he watches the woman whom, in all honour, with a fine and scrupulous fidelity, he has cherished as

his friend. A light as of noon-day has this evening broken upon him. He knows that during the past two years he has been dreaming a dream, and that he has awakened, and as he stands here, beholds the truth, sees Nessie Pinto as she is—not as his imagination may blindly have persisted in painting her. The low sweep of forehead, the mouth whose handsome lines turn to hardness when she laughs, the thick-set throat, the seven-and-three-quarter hands, forcibly compressed into six-and-three-quarter gloves, the belladonna and bismuth, the lap-dog and the apple-green ribbons—every detail of the picture stands out before him with sharp distinctness, in vividest contrast to the girl whose pure voice rings in his ear, whose bunch of violets (tied with the loop of crimson silk) lies hidden, sweet and fragrant, in his breast.

Well, reader, a great pang overcomes him. A sense, almost of personal loss, accompanies

the illumination. He regrets his dream, only, you must understand. The dream, the chivalrous friendship, were his own. Nessie, until death they shall part, constitutes the happiness of Major Pinto. A dream, only. . . . But men cannot part from a dream, a chimera, lightly, as one throws away an old glove! And this chimera, for more than two years, has been quite the cheerfullest thing in Roger Tryan's life—has eaten and drank, has walked and travelled with him, has taken kindly interest in his troubles and his joys, embroidered initials on his handkerchiefs, given him opinions as to morning-suits and neckties, adjusted flowers in his button-hole, and gradually alienated him from the more solvent classes of society.

A grasping, money-loving chimera, if very truth be told. But for two years Roger has believed in it. And he regrets not the poor, jewelled, painted reality under the paper roses

yonder, but his own obstinately believed-in, for-ever-lost ideal.

“She that is kindest.” The burthen of the song rings through his thoughts.

“She that is kindest, when Fortune is blindest,
She shall be first in the songs that we sing.”

If only that kindness, that loyalty, had come from a nobler heart than Nessie Pinto's!

CHAPTER XXIV.

SOME SCRAPS OF PAPER.

THE opening bars of a waltz, *Du und Du*, which the itinerant fiddlers have now begun, sound to Roger Tryan like a death-knell. The lamps, the tinsel roses beneath which Nessie and Sir Dyse are sitting, the jewels on Nessie's throat and wrists, look like the trappings of a charnel.

She sees him, and has the grace to change colour beneath her rouge.

“Our guests arrive so shamefully late! Positively here is Mr. Tryan putting in a first appearance at this hour! As Mrs. Skelton is busy securing partners for the children, I sup-

pose it is my duty to do hostess. You will excuse me, Sir Dyse?"

And, rising hurriedly, Nessie leaves her cavalier in solitary occupation of the pink calico Eden. She advances with a smile, with a glove-imprisoned hand outheld, to receive Roger—the victim whom to-morrow's sun may see added to Count Zecca's neatly-finished list. But the lights dance before her eyes; a choking sensation rises in her throat. Nessie Pinto is better than her own word. Though her colours be nailed to the mast, she is human, very human, at this moment.

"You do not deserve to be spoken to, Mr. Tryan."

When she is in ordinary good-humour, it is her practice to call half the men of her acquaintance by their Christian names. Remorseful, unexpected stirrings of conscience restrain her from using the familiar "Roger" now.

And Tryan, with suspicion already awakened, notes the omission.

"The young ladies would never have forgiven you had you thrown us over. We are so alarmingly in want of dancing men, especially of dancing men with a due allowance of lungs."

Nessie's manner is sportive. She taps her fan with an air of jaunty self-possession upon the palm of her left hand. But Roger knows her well enough to detect that the voice is a tone higher than its natural key, that the over-rigid muscles round the mouth are kept steady by force of will alone.

He looks at her with an expression that Nessie, despite all her assumed coolness, finds it difficult to confront.

"I ought to have been here long ago, Mrs. Pinto; I returned from Monte Carlo, as you must have seen, in the same train with Count Zecca and yourself, hoping to reach the Pension Potpourri in respectable time."

"And you arrive here—in the small hours!"

"Yes. As I was on the point of leaving my hotel a visitor called on me. You can guess, can you not, on what errand?"

"I . . . How, in the name of heaven, should I know anything about it? What concern can I have with Mr. Tryan's mysterious midnight visitors?"

And as Nessie asks this question a mirthless, ringing laugh escapes her lips. Is she to be unmasked openly? Will Roger accuse her to the face of the half-hearted part which she has played? Will he let men suspect, while yet lawful interference may be invoked, that Zecca, her friend, seeks satisfaction for that unknown quantity which he is pleased to call his honour?

Mrs. Pinto feels her limbs grow suddenly weak. Thick, heavy beads gather—white lead and rice-powder notwithstanding—on her forehead.

“What should you know, indeed?” echoes Roger, softening before her visible distress. “As you say, what concern can you have with my mysterious ‘visitors, or their errands?’” Then, as she stands, paralysed, ignorant, in her great terror, as to how much he knows or means to reveal: “Have you no partner for this waltz that is going on?” he asks her lightly. “Is it possible that Mrs. Pinto ever stands out while others dance? Give it to me, then. Business connected with my midnight visitor will not allow me to stay here long,” Roger adds, with a smile. “I should be glad before we say good-night to have a last waltz together.”

“A last—say, rather, a first one.”

Nessie Pinto makes the remark under her breath, not lifting her eyes from the ground; then, resting her hand with an unsteadiness she is ashamed of upon Tryan’s arm, floats away with him among the crowd of dancers.

She is as little given to sentiment as was ever one of Eve's family ; has a quite prosaic and practical soul, poor Nessie ! a soul alive to the hour's pain, the hour's enjoyment, persistently mindful of nothing save the cruelly fluctuating money interests of Major and Mrs. Pinto. Yet, I think, through many a future hour the air of *Du und Du*, that last waltz ever waltzed with Roger Tryan, will be apt to haunt her memory over-pertinaciously.

“ And so, Mrs. Pinto,” says Roger, when the music ceases, “ we stand reconciled, with *Du und Du* bearing witness to our reconciliation. You and I had something half like a quarrel, had we not, during our journey to Monte Carlo ? ”

“ I felt wounded — I thought you had shown a disposition to-day to throw over old and tried friends for fickle ones,” is Nessie's answer.

But she falters as she makes it. She becomes suddenly interested in the workmanship on the handle of her fan.

“I must have shown a very black disposition, if that is true. To throw over a friend,” remarks Roger emphatically, “implies ingratitude—the one sin from which I have hitherto believed myself free. However, we will not misunderstand each other in such an hour as this. I have never thrown *you* over, Mrs. Pinto, and you were the kindest, most unselfish friend in the world to me at a time, long ago, when my need of friendship was sorest. We say good-bye to each other amicably, do we not?”

“Good-bye!” repeats Nessie, set adrift from all her moorings by his tone. “Why, what queer fancy has taken hold of you? You talk as if Pinto and I were not going to see you, as usual, to-morrow morning.”

“Pinto—ah, that reminds me of some-

thing I was in danger of forgetting. Where is your husband ?” Roger asks her. “Not at the club, I know. I called there to inquire on my way. Can you tell me, Mrs. Pinto, where I shall find him ?”

Something in his look, in his cool, concentrated voice, throws the miserable woman altogether off her guard.

“Of course I don’t know where Pinto is,” she exclaims hysterically. “How can you, after all these years, ask me such a question ? You are very strange to-night, Mr. Tryan, I must say. Why should Pinto suddenly begin to tell me about his comings and goings ? You speak as if I had advised him . . . as if he had had some weighty reason for avoiding you.”

As she utters this, her uncalled - for defence, her virtual self-accusation,—utters it with stammering lips, with eyes guiltily downcast,—every dark misgiving that Tryan,

during the last three hours, has been forced to entertain, becomes a certainty.

He turns away; he shuns the pain of looking on her face.

"My seeing or not seeing your husband is unimportant," he remarks quietly. "I had a letter that I wished to give into Pinto's hands——"

"And that you will not trust into mine, I suppose?" interrupts Nessie, with a forced laugh.

They have by this time left the dancing-room: they stand together in a vestibule close beside the outer door of the house. The dreary consumption of Dead Sea apples that at such entertainments goes, inappositely, by the name of refreshments, is taking place just at present in the dingy dining salon. And so it chances that they are alone.

Roger Tryan takes a somewhat bulky letter from the breast-pocket of his coat, and reads the address aloud:

“Frederick Pinto, Esquire, Pension Potpourri, Nice.”

“When I wrote this,” he observes, “I had a strong conviction that Frederick Pinto himself would not be forthcoming. But Pinto need not have feared. Tell him so from me, Mrs. Pinto, when you give him his letter. He could have been present at your dance, could have wished me good-bye in safety. Your husband is the last man I would have seen mixed up with such a piece of folly. You will not forget?”

“I shall repeat the message as you bid me,” she stammers, “but really I am at a loss.”

“Neither you nor Pinto will be at a loss to-morrow,” says Roger Tryan. “Indeed, I think the Major must know pretty well already how matters stand. Good-bye is a sorrowful word to be spoken between old acquaintance,” he adds, looking at her hard. “But time presses—time that I can scarcely call my own.”

And, taking her half-unwilling hand, he wrings it—so heartily that the stitching of the over-tight glove gives way. At which catastrophe Roger Tryan laughs.

“Will you always persist in buying six-and-three-quarter gloves, Mrs. Pinto, or will some newer friend’s wisdom carry more weight with it than mine has done?”

“Some . . . newer friend’s . . .”

Nessie Pinto turns ashen as she realises his meaning.

“Yes. There is a sequel to everything in life, is there not—a third volume to the novel, a last act to the play? However that may be,” says Roger warmly, “you cannot prove yourself braver, cheerier, kinder, to any friend of the future than you were in the old Langen Waldstein days to me. Good-night—good-bye.”

It may be granted that vanity, idleness, self-interest, have been the chief ingredients in

Nessie Pinto's friendship for Roger Tryan. But when he has *gone*, when she hears the departing wheels of his fiacre crunch along the rough, fir-girt road that leads from the Pension Potpourri towards the Nice high road, she feels that she would give her life, could the sacrifice cancel all that has past this evening! Her heart fails her. A nameless terror makes the blood run chill within her veins.

Aurora Skelton, flushed and dishevelled from the dance, finds her friend beside the open door a good many minutes later, still looking forth with blank eagerness into the darkness—still with the letter addressed to Frederick Pinto, Esquire, in her hand.

“We want you awfully, Mrs. Pinto. You must set us all going in the cotillon,” exclaims Aurora, her thoughts intent upon whatever partner of the moment she may have secured. “We want you and Mr. Tryan to lead, and . . . why, you don't mean to say you are alone?”

Mr. Tryan has not forsaken us already, surely?"

"Mr. Tryan has gone to meet Major Pinto," says Nessie, covering up the address of the letter, and instinctively hazarding the statement about whose veracity she is least assured. "I daresay they have some card-appointment or other at the club."

"So like men—bad creatures that they are! I won't speak to Major Pinto for a week," cries Aurora coquettishly, arranging the inflamed shoulder-knots, that, as usual, match her cheeks to a shade. "With our dancing gentlemen so scarce too! Not a good waltzer among them but the poor, asthmatic West Indian. I declare, it's just shameful. However, if Mr. Tryan is *too grand* for the Pension Potpourri, we must get on the best we can without him. 'Quand ong n'a pas ce qu'ong aime,'" says Aurora, with her fine Skeltonian pronunciation of the language, "il faut aimer

ce qu'ong a.' You agree with me, Mrs. Pinto? Mr. Tryan does not deserve that any one should wear willow on his account?"

"I shall be ready to show you the figures in five minutes. I have only to go up to my room—to read a letter," says Nessie, in a steady voice. "Get ready the bouquets and ribbons, ascertain if the Pension Potpourri can furnish a decent handglass, and by the time the people come in from supper I shall be down. As you say, my dear, we must accustom ourselves to neglect. Mr. Tryan has run away. I suppose I shall have to lead the cotillon with some other rather worse waltzer than Mr. Tryan."

Mrs. Pinto trips up the rickety staircase, singing—yes, when many things connected with to-night are talked of by many tongues hereafter, Aurora Skelton, be sure, will have recollections on that point—singing. She gains her bedroom; locks the door; strikes

a light. Then, sinking down, faint and sick, into a chair, she tears open Tryan's letter.

On ordinary occasions, Nessie Pinto would not dare tamper with her husband's correspondence. But before the actual, large tragedy of this hour, even her physical fear of Major Pinto is forgotten.

“HOTEL DES TROIS EMPEREURS,

“NICE, *Midnight*.

“MY DEAR PINTO—It is likely, as you must know, that I shall start on a longish journey in a few hours' time—likely, though, of course, not certain. I am strongly reminded just at present of a very old Joe Miller. You recollect the story of the fire-eating Irishman? He swore he had seen anchovies growing on trees in the West Indies, and only recollected after he had winged his man that he should have said ‘capers.’ But the mistake did very

well to hang a duel on. Your friend, the Monte Carlo Fitzgerald, argues, it would seem, after the same fashion.

“I return some scraps of paper which it may be satisfactory to you to destroy with your own hand—and remain, always, faithfully yours,

ROGER TRYAN.”

This is Roger's letter. The scraps of paper consist of a dozen or more I.O.U's and bills, all of different dates and value, and all bearing the scrawling, barely legible autograph of Major Frederick Pinto.

As Nessie looks through them, one by one, the circumstances under which most of this black - mail was levied come back to her memory with unwelcome clearness. That trifling little racing matter, when Major Pinto was obliged to ask for a temporary loan at Baden ; the embarrassment when their remittance was over-long in arriving from Pinto's

people in England ; the cash that was not forthcoming for travelling expenses when she, Nessie, needed sudden change of air from Evian les Bains ; and so on. Of some later loans, drawn this winter, in Nice, Mrs. Pinto, to do her justice, knows nothing. Twenty-five, fifty, a hundred, another hundred—as late, this one, as last Monday ! She reckons them up roughly. She bethinks her of the sums she has herself playfully borrowed of Roger, when her gambling purse has run short—no uncommon accident—at Monte Carlo ; bethinks her of verbal debts dating as far back as Langen Waldstein, and of which Roger, in his carelessness of money, has probably lost count. Then, rapidly putting herself through an exercise of mental arithmetic, she computes the sum total of their obligations to their friend.

And he has finished with them ; has said his last good-bye to the wife, lent his final

napoleon to the husband. Yes; reading between the lines of his short note, she discerns *that*. Should Roger Tryan escape with his life from Zecca's pistol,—should he never become Joyce's husband, and the son-in-law of Mrs. Dormer,—with Major and Mrs. Pinto he has finished!

“Are you coming down to-night, or not?” cries out Aurora Skelton, as the knuckles of that vivacious young lady rattle loudly at the door. “The poor West Indian has smoked a stramonium cigarette, and is willing to lead off the cotillon while his breath lasts, if Mrs. Pinto will be his partner.”

“Mrs. Pinto is not coming,” answers Nessie shortly. “You must get on with your cotillon as best you can. Mrs. Pinto feels tired, and will appear no more to-night.”

Let us leave her to her vigils, reader! Let us imagine, with what brevity we may, the moment when Pinto, returning from his haunts,

red-eyed, empty of pocket, in the winter's morning, shall find Nessie—still in her brave attire, still with the scraps of paper between her cold hands—to bid him welcome !

CHAPTER VII.

THE MONTE CARLO TRAGEDY.

THE four-and-twenty hours that follow upon her meeting with Roger Tryan are passed in a fever of expectation by Joyce.

She has said "Yes," with readiness more than mistrusted by Mrs. Dormer, to the scheme for leaving Nice; has worked cheerfully at the thousand small details of packing, bill-paying, and millinery necessitated by their sudden exodus. She has even, at her mother's entreaty, written a pleasant, gossiping little note to John Farintyre—a note setting forth the expediency of trying Roman air, without delay, for one's poor, overtaxed nerves, and containing (for this Mrs. Dormer

stipulates) a description of their last night's visit to Monte Carlo—with only the part of Hamlet omitted from the play!

But, though she sustains her courage stoutly, Joyce Dormer's heart is on fire. She listens to every ring at the outer door bell, to every fiacre that rattles down the street, almost to every foot-fall that passes along the pavement beneath her window.

Roger Tryan *must* come. So she repeats to herself with the passionate stubbornness that implies a mental doubt. When was Roger's word other than a bond? Come he will and must. The clearing-up of many a bygone trouble, explanations before the logic of whose pathos even Mrs. Dormer shall melt, will follow. A little time longer, and this strained travesty of life, in which for more than two years they have all acted a part, shall be put away—John Farintyre, even, be brought to see the wisdom of a frank, a loyal disloyalty.

A little longer, and she shall taste happiness at the mere vision of which her worn cheeks flush, her eyes fill with the youthful hope and tenderness from which she has been too long alienated.

But the silent hours come and go ; the January twilight dies ; the lamps are lit. By-and-by Mrs. Dormer, curiously pale and tired after paying a round of farewell visits, comes home to dinner. And still there is no word of Roger Tryan.

Will he write ? Will he call ere they depart to-morrow ? Or—but Joyce's heart scouts the supposition ere it has had time to frame itself into words—has he fallen back already under the estranging influence of the last two years ? Will that influence keep him from the reconciliation that it needs but a hand-pressure, needs but a couple of hurried sentences, to bring about ?

Mrs. Dormer, I say, looks pale. More

than this, Mrs. Dormer's magnificent digestion, for once, would seem to be at fault. This most philosophical of women turns away from the sight of food. Her hands play her false when she attempts to use a knife and fork.

Joyce comments, jestingly, upon the fact.

"I think you must be leaving your heart behind you in Nice, mother. Do you know that you are looking as white as a little spectre? Do you know that your hands tremble to such a degree that you cannot carve?"

"My wrists are tired. The natural result of holding up a long dress," answers Mrs. Dormer with presence of mind, but not encountering her daughter's eyes. "Can any fashion be more absurdly tyrannical than that of training yards of silk in the dust simply because a score of tiresome visits have to be paid!"

“But surely you did not make the round of all those houses on foot, mother?”

And as she asks this question Joyce looks a little more narrowly at her mother’s face.

“I dismissed my fiacre at the Bosanquets. It was shorter for me to run through the gardens of the Maison Narcisse, and so gain the side entrance of the Villa Cairngorum. Lady Cairngorum is quite in despair, Joyce, at our departure.”

“Lady Cairngorum has had hopes of me as a medium for her séances. ‘With those eyes of yours,’ she always says, ‘those big, blue, somewhat vacant eyes of yours, my dear Miss Dormer, you ought to look further into the Unseen Universe than the rest of us.’”

“The Unseen Universe!” ejaculates little Mrs. Dormer.

A volume of adverse criticism is epitomised in her manner of accenting these words.

“And do you know, mother, I have

wondered, now and then, if old Lady Cairngorum be right. I feel myself at times, especially when Stradiuarius is in my hands, that I get deeper glimpses under the surface of things than is altogether canny."

"My dear Joyce! This might do very well for dear, credulous Lady Cairngorum. For you and me it is sadly idle talk."

But Mrs. Dormer's face grows whiter and whiter. She puts down, untasted, the morsel that, when Joyce spoke, was on its road from her plate to her mouth.

"Why, only this evening when I was waiting for you to return, I took my violin and played—as you like to hear me play, mamma, letting my fingers guide themselves. The saddest, strangest wail came from the strings—murmurs, I could not help thinking, like those that you might catch from the lips of a dying man."

Pushing her plate away, Mrs. Dormer rises hastily from the table.

"Such notions are morbid! Such taste belongs to an inferior walk of art! In music, or literature, or painting, no person of culture ever runs after the sensational."

"Unfortunately, in real life, the sensational runs after us," insists Joyce. "Cultivated taste may do much. It cannot keep tragedy from sometimes knocking at our doors."

Mrs. Dormer moves an uncertain step or so: stooping, she rests her lips upon her daughter's silken head.

"We are over-strung, both of us, my poor child. The last forty-eight hours have been quite too full of painful emotions for the good of one's nerve-centres. We must go to rest immediately—I confess myself, for once, to be beyond food—must get up all the strength we can for to-morrow's needs. Our train starts at five minutes before two, and there are cards still to be left—farewells to be taken before we depart."

When to-morrow comes, however, Mrs. Dormer's nerve-centres do not seem to have righted themselves. She admits that she has not slept an hour. Her cheeks are still unnaturally pale, her hand still trembles. Nice, she declares, did she stay longer here, would kill her. Filippo Filippi was right;—for the disorders of a delicately-strung nature must not a poet be the best of all physicians? The irritating climate of the Riviera disagrees with her frightfully. Rome, Pisa,—any place sheltered from the influence of this Mediterranean air,—must be reached, and without delay.

As the morning advances Mrs. Dormer's symptoms of uneasiness increase. She has not stamina enough left to face the light of day, or the eyes of her acquaintance. A commissioner must take round such cards as still require to be left, and she will bid farewell to no one;—to no one save her old friend, Lady

Joan Majendie, with whom she whispers during a mysteriously agitated five minutes, Joyce, present, in a remote corner of the room.

To get away from Nice; never for an instant to lose her daughter out of her sight—these seem to be the two imperative desires by which Mrs. Dormer is possessed. And she succeeds in carrying both into effect. Very few of their acquaintance, as it chances, are at the station on this Thursday afternoon, although Thursday is the day on which you may hear Beethoven, Spohr, and Mozart, played by the finest band in Europe, gratuitously. And these few—long afterwards, Joyce grasps the significance of that fact—do not press forward to wish the departing travellers Godspeed.

Mrs. Dormer gives a sigh of relief as the train glides forth into the open country. It is one of those exquisite days when only the name of the month can recall to Northern senses an idea of winter. The fair broad plain

of vine and olive on the left is bathed in mellowest sunshine ; on the right an outline of distant Corsican mountains shows, transparently clear, above the waveless purple of the sea. Only one other passenger is with them in the carriage—an Englishman, absorbed in his newspaper at the farther end of the compartment, and evidently belonging to the safe tourist class, who interview Europe with the aid of coupons ; the last human creature living, thinks Mrs. Dormer, recovering her spirits, from whom enlightenment as to Nice or Monte Carlo goings-on need be feared.

“Thank heaven, we are off safe ! I feel as though an incubus of dull care, a weight as of some horrible nightmare, had been taken suddenly from my shoulders.”

The remark escapes her lips unguardedly. It is far more Mrs. Dormer’s habit to use speech for the concealment, than for the expression, of her thoughts.

Joyce's look is restless. She leans forth her face to catch a last glimpse of Nice with a wistful eagerness that it may be well John Farintyre is not present to witness.

"I might be ready also to thank heaven if I knew we were leaving Dull Care behind us, mother. Unfortunately, he is as prompt a traveller as we are. You remember Hans Andersen's story of the Quarter Day Flitting? All the family and their belongings are there, —the grandfather's crutch, the baby's cradle, —and, as they start, the skeleton leaves his cupboard, grim death jumps up behind the coach and accompanies them on the road. Depend upon it, though we may not see him, our own particular skeleton has forsaken his cupboard, and travels with us to-day."

The colour of Mrs. Dormer's cheek does not improve at the suggestion.

"You are in the groove of sensation still, Joyce. The calming influences of ruins and

galleries and soft Campagna air are as needful for you as for me. We shall come in for the best season of Roman flowers," Mrs. Dormer adds,—“violets, narcissus, roses, and a little later on—orange blossoms.”

There is a perceptible, an intentional shade of meaning in the way the last word is uttered.

“You did right to put violets the first on your list, mother,” is Joyce’s quiet answer. “They are the fittest of all flowers to associate with Rome—the flowers of death.”

Amongst the thirty or forty persons who quit the train at Monte Carlo Station is the English traveller mentally labelled by Mrs. Dormer’s inner consciousness as “Safe.” It chances that, in the hurry of getting out, this traveller leaves his newspaper, the current number of the *Nice Anglo-American*, behind him. It also chances that Joyce, mechanically, rather than because she feels an interest in the chronicling of Nice fashion-

able life, takes the paper in her hand, and glances carelessly down its columns.

“‘The Monte Carlo Tragedy. . . Latest Particulars’—Why, mother, what can this tragedy be about? You and I are always the last people to hear news. ‘Mysterious Disappearance of——’”

So far and no farther has Joyce had time to read aloud, when the paper is snatched from her—I should say with a gesture of violence, if any action of soft, dimpled little Mrs. Dormer could be violent—is torn hastily into fragments and scattered through the open carriage window.

“Such publicity is quite too bad! The reports of these sensational proceedings should not be given in respectable newspapers. What have young unmarried girls—what has a child like you—got to do with the suicides and horrors that are the scandal of the Monte Carlo gambling-tables?”

Joyce looks at her mother with just that shade of surprise that borders nearly on a suspicion.

"One has got to do with everything, mamma. Young women cannot be kept under a glass-case simply because they wear no wedding - ring on their third left hand finger ! You have aroused my curiosity," she persists. "What can there be in this Monte Carlo scandal that makes it more tragic than every *Times* newspaper one reads, or more dangerous than every walk one takes along the London streets ?"

Mrs. Dormer's most intimate enemies—let me use stronger language, her dearest friends—agree in crediting her with the virtue of uniform truthfulness. She is too refined of taste, too cultivated of understanding, has too acute a knowledge of social intercourse, too keen a sympathy with common human likes and dislikes, not to hold trivial and purposeless fictions in contempt.

When unlooked-for necessity arises, when embroidery has to be wrought on a large scale—like that of the Gobelins, say, or the tapestry of Bayeux—little Mrs. Dormer rises to the situation: then is she an artist who falters not nor fails over her work.

“There are scandals and scandals, Joyce. Some things may not be intrinsically worse than others, but they are more unbecoming for a girl of your age to read about. You know the Polish Countess we remarked so often in brown-and-gold at San Remo? ‘*Si jeune, et déjà Polonaise!*’ little Doctor Vladimer used to say of her. Surely it could not be especially edifying for you to learn in what society, and carrying away what amount of rouleaux, that lady has decamped from Monte Carlo?”

For a few seconds Joyce looks fixedly at her mother. She is unsuspecting of deceit;

and yet, as I have said, her state of mind approaches that of suspicion. Unconsciously to herself, she is on the look-out for some grim logic of facts that shall account for Roger's silence.

"Would the disappearance of a Polish Countess be called a tragedy?" she asks, "even by the horror-seeking editor of a Nice newspaper?"

"It might be a tragedy to the former possessor of the rouleaux—though really I know none of the details. It is the kind of thing I have not patience to read through. Sometimes I have speculated," says Mrs. Dormer after a pause, "*why* Polish countesses can never be original! If one of the sisterhood would only commit a respectable, commonplace action it would have the zest of an epigram. As it is," Mrs. Dormer glances up with her soft eyes at the scarce softer heaven—"one knows the Continent too

well, has seen too much of that dull comedy called Fast Life, to be amused by the disreputable."

And Joyce, whatever vague misgivings trouble her conscience still, is silenced.

CHAPTER VIII.

OIL IN ONE'S MACARONI.

THE night is chill when they stop at Pisa Station, and as their journey is to be continued early on the following day, Mrs. Dormer decides to put up at the nearest hotel, an old-fashioned, thoroughly Italian loggia, unmentioned by Bradshaw or by Murray, just within the city walls.

Bare of carpet or matting are this loggia's tile-paved floors. The only vacant apartment is low-roofed and ghostly ; a kind of rambling vault upon the ground-floor, full of dark nooks, of possible lurking-places, and hung round with tapestry so gloomy in design and hue it might have more fitly decked an antechamber

of the Inquisition than a modern sleeping-room. The quickly-served supper, is, however, of its kind, good ; the handsome waiting-women are courteous ; a glorious fire soon crackles and blazes on the hearth. And by the time twelve o'clock strikes from the neighbouring church of San Stefano the travellers are peacefully settled for the night — Mrs. Dormer's watch and purse under her pillow ; Joyce's treasure, her Stradiuarius, placed on a chair so as to be within reach of her hand.

One. Two. Three. San Stefano has boomed forth that weirdest, coldest hour of the February morning, when Mrs. Dormer's slumbers are broken by a cry. She starts up in terror, even her least excitable of brains haunted, perhaps, by some story of darker import than missing rouleaux or levanting Polish countesses ; then, collecting her startled senses with an admirable effort of will, raises herself

into a listening attitude, and glances round the room.

All is outwardly quiet. The olive-logs no longer flame, but a steady glow from their red embers lights up every corner and recess of the tapestried walls. Mrs. Dormer's purse and trinkets are safe; a primary instinct causes her to grope for these. Her daughter (second care of her soul) lies asleep, but with a face livid as death, with throat and neck convulsed, with eyes half unclosed, with parted, murmuring lips.

"Stradiuarius . . . Mother, you should have given it me back. *That*, at least, was my own." So, sleeping still, the girl wanders on, in short, incoherent utterances. "But you have broken my heart at last—thrown it away for your pleasure. Roger! You here too? then let us make up old quarrels. What do you shrink from, mother? Why do you look so strangely at Roger's hand? . . . Mrs. Pinto

a false friend to him . . . ay, we knew that, long ago . . . a fair-weather friend, a creature of paint and paste, and I . . . ah, my dear, let us go back to the old happiness . . . You will come to-morrow. You will bring me the violets you promised . . . not—ah God, not those! They are red, they are covered with blood. Take them from me.”

A cry, bitterer, longer than the former one, rings through the room, and in another half-minute Mrs. Dormer, hastily shawled and slipped, stands beside her daughter's pillow.

“Joyce, my love, listen to me. Wake up thoroughly and forget all you have been dreaming about. The macaroni must have had oil in it! Impossible for the conscience to be at rest, with the digestion in rebellion.”

For Mrs. Dormer, a lax believer on many points, does yet cast sure anchor in the haven of matter-of-fact. Holding the old-fashioned process called introspection in contempt, Mrs.

Dormer believes that all solution of our mental and moral troubles ought to come from the side of physiology. Love, fear, regret, she considers subjects for the microscope or dissecting knife; and passionate grief . . . "an ophthalmic affection," as some one once suggested, "of the nerve of the fifth pair!"

"If we could have perfect cooking we should have perfect dreams. Until that millennium comes—especially after supping in an Italian inn—we may do something by directing our thoughts wisely when we lay our heads on our pillow. How would my life have been ruined had I not looked upon the banishing of ugly nightmares *as a duty*. Pray command yourself, my dear. Endeavour to put whatever nonsense you may have been dreaming about away from you. Twenty grains of chloral, some hours of sound sleep, and you will wake up a different creature."

Mrs. Dormer, after striking a light, searches among the compartments of a travelling-bag for her poisons, scales and weights. And Joyce comes slowly back from the land of spectres to reality.

Her small white face is bathed in sweats ; her damp hair hangs in masses round her forehead. Her features have the pinched look of one whose feet tread the banks of the chill ford, who listens to voices, sees visions, that the bystanders, strong, healthy, broken-hearted, wot not of !

“Come to me mother—quick. I want to get warm—I want to feel your hand. Leave drugs and weights and measures alone,” she cries impatiently. “What need have I of drugs? Hydrate of chloral . . . ‘arrest of function . . . normal molecular action’ . . . Yes, I remember it all ; I know what kind of peace of mind can be bought by chloral. We tried the efficacy of manufactured sleep pretty

often, if you recollect, two years ago, at the time I tried to leave off thinking of Roger."

Mrs. Dormer shivers. For a person of strong reason, with whom sentiment and emotion are nowhere, she really has become absurdly impressionable during the last eight-and-forty hours.

"We ought to have taken places in a sleeping-car, to have travelled on to Rome without stopping—the plan dear, wise Lady Joan recommended. These atrocious tapestries, even without oil in one's macaroni, would account for any number of bad dreams."

Joyce, upon this, raises herself to a sitting position. Stretching forth her hands to her violin, she plays a few muffled pizzicato notes that in the night's dead silence sound to Mrs. Dormer uncomfortably like the moaning of a human voice. The embers of the wood-fire at this moment fall together. They send up

a last ruddy flame upon the opposite wall ; they light into weird distinctness one particular scene not two yards distant from Joyce's bed—a scene of which the chief foreground figure is a wounded knight, pierced through mail and corslet, and with his enemy, masked and sinister, bending over him in his death-swoon.

“He is there—I was dreaming of him when you woke me, mother,” exclaims the girl, pointing with her pale, earthly cold hand to the wall. “Who shall read the meaning of my dream ? Who shall say it was not fate that sent us to this hotel, into this room, to-night ?”

“There is no such entity as fate, my poor child. We look back from experience to accident. We talk because our mothers and grandmothers did so before us, and because we inherit certain of their fibres, about destiny.”

"At first we were travelling away from Nice, you and I together. This was the beginning of my dream. And the Englishman who got out at Monaco left his Anglo-American behind him, just as it all happened, really, on our journey to-day."

"Say, rather, yesterday." Mrs. Dormer glances across with pathos at her vacant pillow. "We are already shivering in the small hours of February the 1st."

"I took the paper up, and you bade me read it aloud. The first word I saw was Roger Tryan's name, printed in blood-red letters underneath the Monte Carlo Tragedy."

"Roger Tryan—the hero of our Polish Countess's escapade!" observes Mrs. Dormer, with a laugh unsuggestive of amusement.

"That is how your voice sounded in my dream, mother. I tried to read, but could not. Only those words: The Monte Carlo Tragedy; and Roger's name stood out clear

before me. And, suddenly, you began to laugh ; you snatched the paper from my hand, tore it across, and threw both pieces through the window. Now that I am awake, it seems absurd, but at the time it was the painfulest dream I ever had in my life. For when I looked at that which you had thrown away, I knew that it was my Stradiuarius."

"It was the oil in the macaroni," sighs little Mrs. Dormer. "But, real or fancied, my sin was scarcely mortal. Some men have held that violins—like hearts, Joyce—are all the stronger for breaking and putting together again."

"After that I went back with a leap—this made me know that I was dreaming—to the Monte Carlo gambling-rooms. I could smell that sickening mixture of gas and patchouli and otto of roses. I could hear the voices of the croupiers. I saw—I see them now—the eyes and forehead, the bare wrists and bracelets,

of Mrs. Pinto. And then, suddenly, I knew that you and Filippo were gone, and a Frenchman I stood near spoke—I don't know what words—and Roger pushed forward and stood between him and me."

"Mr. Roger Tryan, as usual, showed more temper than brains." For the moment Mrs. Dormer is betrayed into this small show of feeling. "But we will put off discussion of his merits and demerits until I have the negative advantage of feeling warm. What we want now is golden silence. At midday we shall be off—to scenes charmingly remote from over-strained and painful associations. Let us do our best to sleep while we can."

"I have something still to say, mother—not about my dream, but about that real waking night in Monte Carlo. I had got separated from you and Filippo, as you know, just when the royal Austrian people were coming in. And all at once I found that I

had mistakenly laid my hand upon a stranger's arm, a vile-looking man, covered with rings and chains, who turned and spoke to me in French. At the same moment I caught Mrs. Pinto's eyes—I heard her laugh. And then, instantly, the crowd opened; I saw the Frenchman spin away like a ball, and I knew that Roger was at my side. Mamma, dearest, be patient with me," she pleads, "only for two or three minutes longer. I want you to answer a question, truly as you would answer a last question I might put to you before I died."

"Day will be breaking on us, Joyce! Ask me anything you choose at a more fitting time and season. If only for one's looks' sake, let us try to get a little sleep."

"You have seen so much of the world, have read so many books—I think, perhaps, have read so many men's hearts—that you must certainly know this thing. Could an action like Roger Tryan's be construed into an insult?

I mean . . . I mean . . .” As Joyce’s lips falter forth the question, her pinched, small face turns a shade more ghastly. “Is it the kind of thing that ever leads, among men of the world, to a challenge?”

This time Mrs. Dormer gives a laugh whose frank spontaneity might make the fortune of an aspirant actress. And still, it is not the kind of laugh one would care to have graven on one’s recollection.

“Challenges, except among German students and Parisian editors, are as much out of date, my child, as hair-powder. If a gentleman unfortunately meet with insult now-a-days, he elevates his eyebrows, lets fall his eye-glass,” says Mrs. Dormer gaily, “possibly writes a letter to the morning papers, and in any case pockets the affront. All these usages are ruled by fashion. One generation carries about a tindery affair called ‘honour,’ ever ready to blaze, in its waistcoat pocket, just

as another carries a snuff-box, and a third a crutch and toothpick."

"I am glad to hear you speak so lightly! I am glad to think you are *positively* certain. Because—oh, mother, my dream shifted to something too horrible! Come and hold me close. Let me feel your arm, both arms, around me."

She nestles, like a little child seeking for shelter, in Mrs. Dormer's somewhat lax clasp.

"The gas went out, suddenly; the patchouli and rose scents, the croupiers, the gaily dressed crowd, all vanished into darkness. Then I found myself, just, it seemed, as morning was breaking, in that field where they have the pigeon-shooting outside Monaco. And I saw Roger Tryan lying on the ground, with the same Frenchman who spoke to me in the gambling-rooms leaning over him."

"You saw me, also, of course?" exclaims Mrs. Dormer in a forced, unnatural voice. "I

am sure to be the tragic element in every scene with which Mr. Roger Tryan is connected."

"No, mother, you were not there, nor—nor were the Pintos; I saw only two or three men whose faces I did not know, and Monsieur Gervais the surgeon. Gervais knelt and supported Roger on his arm. It was as plain, all of it, as the tapestry hanging on the wall yonder. No dream of my whole life was ever so fearfully real as this one. Well, and while I was looking, Roger called me by my name, and I went to him. He took a bunch of violets from his breast, Gervais holding him still, and, as I stooped over him, I saw that the violets were covered in blood! I knew that Roger was wounded, dying. And then I heard your voice, and I awoke."

During the narration of Joyce's dream Mrs. Dormer has contrived to glide from her daughter's embrace. She has got back again to the table, and by the feeble candle-light

has commenced to weigh out chloral hydrate from a mysterious little stoppered bottle. The hand that holds the scales is firm. Mrs. Dormer adds to, she takes from, the glistening heap of "hell in crystals," until the dose is measured to a nicety.

"Although you do not believe in the virtues of manufactured sleep, my dear, I do. Sleep, at any price, is what my nerves want." And indeed, though Mrs. Dormer's hand be untrembling, her white face seems to have aged by a dozen years. "My brain is harassed, not by supernatural visions, but by commonplace bodily fatigue. As to your dream, child," she runs on with a desperate effort at unconcern, "if such nonsense affected one at all it ought to be cheerfully. All old wives' calculations, you know, should be worked backwards. To dream of a person's death is omen of his marriage. How if there should be other happy events on the tapis besides a

certain Roman wedding to which you and I are looking forward ?”

Joyce falls back on her pillow with a gesture of impatience, then, turning her eyes steadfastly towards the window, she resolves to watch for daylight, to dream no more.

Alas ! sleep can no more be eluded than it can be wooed by the miserable. The poor girl dreams again and again of her old lover, now in England, now in Nice, now on the moonlit terrace of Monte Carlo. And each time her promised bunch of violets is in Roger's hand ; and each time, ere she can approach near enough to take them from him, the violets become red with blood.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. PETER MAGRATH.

BUT when did Rome, true Mother of Consolation, fail of yielding balm to the soul in which art is a passion ?

Especially in the present hot-and-cold state of Joyce Dormer's feelings,—her heart in revolt at Roger's silence, yet feverishly expectant of news from him by every post,—Roman air, Roman associations, are as saving medicine. Mrs. Dormer, clever always at obtaining picturesque environment on moderate terms, has secured to herself the portion of a third-floor flat in a tumble-down sixteenth century palace, closely bordering on the Piazza del Popolo. From the windows of this lodging

can be seen the Hill of Gardens, the fair cypress and ilex groves, the statues, the terraces of the Pincian, with the distant trees of the Borghese Villa, and a glimpse of snowy Apennine for background. February has set in warm, blue, flower-laden. The mere animal sense of being alive is a pleasure. Chloral hydrate may rest for good in its stoppered bottle! No need to seek manufactured sleep in this enervating air, amidst the thousand spirit-healing influences of a Roman spring.

Enervating: the word must ever hold good in speaking of the Eternal City's climate: and still, every hour of the too-brief day is occupied, has its own potent and absorbing interest. The forenoons are given up to churches, Basilicas, galleries, or to long drives in the Campagna, golden now with cistus, white with stately asphodel. Joyce was a child when last the Dormers visited Rome, and carries in her memory only such surface details as lend

a keener edge to present enjoyment. In the afternoon, Mrs. Dormer is called upon to pay visits, to shop, to attend to letters—as Easter approaches, it would seem that the Farintyre love letters fall more than ever into the elder lady's hands. And Joyce, by inadvertence, perhaps—if it were possible for Mrs. Dormer to act inadvertently — is left alone. Alone in their delightfully-shabby, scagliolo-floored Roman drawing-room, with the pathetic sweetness of the outside world, her Stradiuarius, her own hopes and fears, imperiously shaping themselves at each new moment into melody for companionship !

Should these emotion-fraught Lenten weeks be counted among the least happy ones of Joyce Dormer's life ? She herself could scarcely answer that question. There are mental states which quicken the senses, morbidly, like opium. The phase of feeling through which Joyce is passing now belongs to them. Never

again shall skies be so sapphire to her, or marble walls so white, or anemone petals so scarlet. Never shall spring violets smell so pungent, or the voices of children ring so clear, as during these weeks of intense moral strain in Rome. And to the true artist temperament this simple fact of heightened physical susceptibility is not without a certain poignant charm.

It is her habit to rise betimes. While the gardens are still deserted she takes a walk each morning, unattended by chaperon or handmaiden, along a favourite dewy path of the Pincian—Rome at her feet, in the distance the gray undulations of campagna melting into purple until a silver line above Ostia marks the line of sea. As she passes the shadow of one isolated group of feather palms, Joyce tells herself daily, with the facile superstition of her age, that she reads a good omen in the shifting hieroglyphic cast by the

level sun upon the grass ! She feels that she *must* receive a letter from Tryan by the early post, and returns home, morning after morning, a colour on her cheek, a fire rather than a light in her blue eyes, to cruelest disappointment. Always is her plate on the breakfast-table empty, always is her mother elbow-deep in letters : business letters from London lawyers, love letters from John Farintyre, scrawls from Paris milliners (quietly, and without much consulting of Joyce, the trousseau all this time progresses), ominously long missives from Lady Joan Majendie, brief marital notes from poor, dear Mr. Dormer, away still at Naples with his teapots.

Early breakfast over, Mrs. Dormer must see to her housekeeping ; it is a characteristic of this dimpled, guileless little woman that she never allows herself to be cheated—no, not even by a Roman cook ; and Joyce has another hour of independence. This is the hour when

“Shipwreck” makes greatest outward progress, when her power of composition is at its strongest. Thrice blessed power—divine alchemy through whose means dull care evaporates for the artist heart in golden aerial clouds! Does not composition, if it be written down, require mechanical work? does not mechanical work, while it lasts, bring wholesome forgetfulness? Even throughout the forenoon’s sight-seeing, although ruled paper and her violin are no longer at hand, the people who commit fiascoes, the Shipwreck in which such people end, are present to Joyce’s mind. Her own poor bit of amateur nineteenth century music takes to itself colour and depth and richness from the ruins of the world’s art, the mighty creations of a thousand years ago, amidst which the girl-composer moves. At two comes luncheon, enlivened often by the presence of some artist or musical friend of former days. Afterwards there is a saunter

through the Borghese gardens, a visit to some neighbouring church or convent. And then Mrs. Dormer's engagements claim her; and Joyce is left to solitude, her instrument, and her own thoughts till dinner.

A surface observer might well doubt the wisdom of such a plan—might hold that the way to burn Tryan's image deeper than ever on the girl's heart would be in this very dreamy Roman life that her mother has chalked out for her. But little Mrs. Dormer knows her work. Roger Tryan's image, most things connected with poor Roger Tryan, affect Mrs. Dormer moderately just at present. She is in a condition of masterly inactivity, simply purposing to gain, may not one say to kill, time until Easter! On the Saturday in Easter week it is a tacitly accepted fact that Joyce shall be married. We are already well advanced in Lent, the wedding-dresses progressing in Paris, the settlements in London;

John Farintyre is in tolerable temper ; a certain untoward affair that might have wrought disturbance to our peace dying, let us hope, into oblivion in the neighbourhood of Nice and Monte Carlo. Once married, and the dear child's happiness will be safe—a sincere belief: men and women do not talk pretty euphemisms when they commune with their own conscience. To a wife, impressed by new and graver responsibilities, the details of that wild Monte Carlo escapade, should they, unhappily, come to light, would cause pain, but pain that *must be borne*. What woman among us but has had, alas ! to pass through some bitter ordeal of the heart, yet give the world no sign ?

And then money, vulgar money, as an anodyne, is so all-powerful, especially for a temperament half-fire, half-dew, like Joyce's ! With her touch of genius, her refined, her singular beauty—and all the solid thousands that the elder Mr. Farintyre is ready to settle

—to what position, in London or abroad, may she not attain? When, only, this critical interval before the wedding-day is tided over! When, only, under Brussels veil and orange-blossoms, Joyce shall have been brought to swear honour, allegiance, and love to Mr. John Farintyre till death them shall part!

The days, the weeks pass by propitiously. Almost does Mrs. Dormer feel that plaster-of-Paris cupids and barley-sugar temples are in sight. Then, on the very day when Farintyre is to arrive in Rome, occurs an incident, trivial in itself, yet well-nigh causing the downfall of solider fabrics than barley-sugar; an incident showing the weak foundations upon which the fondest, the most virtuous, human projects stand.

Leisurely strolling, towards sunset, her hand upon her daughter's arm, on the narcissus-studded sward of the Borghese gardens, Mrs. Dormer abruptly finds herself face to face with

a Nice acquaintance, bodily escape hopeless, moral deliverance almost equally so. For the acquaintance is an erewhile inmate of the Pension Potpourri,—as a consequence must be conversant with the latest news of Major and Mrs. Pinto, with all the miserable history in which Major and Mrs. Pinto are negatively involved. The acquaintance, moreover, has the reputation of being garrulous and underbred ; a travelling Mrs. Candour, ever posted in the small English gossip of every Continental town she haunts, and ever ready, in harshest tones, with disregard as to whether the recital entail pain or pleasure upon her hearers, to publish it abroad.

“Mamma,” whispers Joyce, with the kind of instinctive moral shiver that goes before a blow, “do you see who is approaching under the ilex shade? Mrs. Peter Magrath, one of the musical geniuses whom we met in Nice at Lady Joan Majendie’s charity concert. Surely

you have not forgotten the poor, little, bowing Belfast husband who told me I should play, as his Gerty sang, ‘with sowl!’ I propose flight.”

“And I—propose civility,” is Mrs. Dormer’s answer. “We will behave ourselves amicably, believe as much only as charity permits of the latest Nice news, and pass quickly on. Dear Mrs. Magrath,” for by this time the lady is within earshot, “welcome to Rome. Like so many people of artistic taste, you are drawn to the feet of the great enchantress at Easter?”

Mrs. Peter Magrath is tall, rectangular, flat of profile, determined of mien. Long is Mrs. Peter’s throat and lean, a throat most unsuggestive of sweet or tender melody. She carries a walking-stick; she affects a masculine and swinging gait; she wears a Newmarket overcoat, a stand-up collar, and a man’s hat.

Rome, it has been said, is the city of abrupt contrasts. Could aught more jarring be found

than this modern Briton, with her profile and her Newmarket coat, in the Borghese gardens ? Mrs. Peter Magrath walking under shelter of the ilex trees and stone pines ; amidst the immemorial avenues of cypress ; the fountains plashing into marble basins ; gray, broken statues and columns . . . “All so little changed,” said Corinne, “that Ovid and Virgil might walk here, and believe themselves still in the Augustan age.”

She advances, her eyes fixed with a curious expression on Joyce's face.

“Quite an unexpected pleasure, Mrs. Dormer. That is to say, every one in Nice knew you had gone on to Rome, but one scarcely expected to meet you in any *public place*. Ah, and poor Miss Dormer ! She is looking aged, is she not ? A wreck really, considering the short time. A tremendous talk there was, I assure you, when you went away so suddenly ; but for my part I thought

your departure very natural. As I said to Peter——”

“I trust Mr. Magrath’s health has improved,” cries Joyce’s mother, by the pressure of her fingers on her daughter’s arm showing her readiness to move on. “The air of Rome so deliciously sedative,” she generalises rapidly, “invaluable in some complicated cases of asthma—Mr. Magrath quite certain to derive benefit, and——”

“Mr. Magrath derives benefit nowhere,” says Mr. Magrath’s owner rather tartly. “I declare ours has been the oddest kind of wedding-tour imaginable! When once you start the round of these invalid places, the chest doctors spin you on from one to another like a bad penny. If you listened to the chest doctors you would think lungs the only things in the world worth living for. Now there was Porquerolles, the first place we stopped at in the south. Porquerolles suited me to a T.

There was a Philharmonic Society, entirely composed of gifted amateurs, the three resident families of the place. I was elected a member at once. We met, Wednesdays and Saturdays, and rendered music, *not* as the professionals teach,"—Mrs. Peter Magrath's tone becomes accentuated,—“but as we of the Porquerolles Philharmonic felt it ought to be rendered—with soul. We may not, like Miss Dormer, have studied fugue or counterpoint. We looked upon our art as a thing of inspiration, not of rule—yes, and there was not one among us, I may say, but had a spark of the Divine Afflatus! Mr. Magrath, of course, fell ill just when we were in full practice for our Shrove Tuesday concert, and the doctor we called in from Marseilles—I told my husband, because he wanted to get the case off his hands—sent us on to Nice.”

“Where we may be certain Mrs. Magrath's talent met with fullest appreciation.”

As she utters the compliment Mrs. Dormer turns, uneasily anxious for flight.

“The musical world of Nice is too much cut up into cliques for my taste. I have nothing to say for, or against, their Philharmonic Society.” Of which Mrs. Peter Magrath was, possibly, not a member. “But the music in some of the churches was fair; I volunteered my services at two of the choirs in addition to my four hours’ daily practice at our pension, and I had almost promised to sing in one of the anthems at Easter, when the climate, of course, began to disagree with Mr. Magrath. Equally, of course, the doctor passed us on here. Pray, Miss Dormer,” turning her attention again to Joyce, “what outlook in the musical way has one got in Rome?”

“Everything in Rome is musical,” says Joyce, glancing across the Muro Torto towards the point where St. Peter’s mighty

dome cleaves the sunset sky. "In Rome you not only forget your own poorness as a musician, you forget yourself altogether."

The Machiavellian accents of Mrs. Dormer chime in softly—

"When Lent is done with there will be a burst of concerts, public and private, at which talent, a pure soprano voice like Mrs. Magrath's, would be justly valued. Rome has a short season of English gaiety, as you know, Mrs. Magrath, after Easter, and before people move on to Naples. At present we are keeping Lent in true Lenten fashion, not even an organ to be heard in the churches."

"Oh, indeed. I have no doubt it suits Miss Joyce Dormer's feelings to be quiet."

Mrs. Peter Magrath gives the stab with slow emphasis, deliberately pausing to watch the effect it shall produce.

Has it ever occurred to you, reader, that a smattering of art or of music makes a narrow

soul narrower, extending its scope on the side only of dull and pitiful jealousies? But for her weak thread of a soprano voice, but for her insatiate musical ambition, who shall say that Mrs. Magrath might not have been a passively amiable woman, an innocuous one, at least, like certain insects which, although devoid of beauty, neither buzz nor sting!

“You have changed sadly, Miss Dormer, since that evening I met you in Nice, at Lady Joan Majendie’s, the evening when you improvised, you know—ha, ha! I always laugh when I think of *an English person* improvising—on your violin.”

Joyce does not answer. The colour comes and goes with over-clear distinctness on her transparent face. She feels that while she lives she must remember the moment’s vaguely prophetic pain, the grotesque rectangular outlines of Mrs. Peter Magrath, the dusky arch of ilex and pines, the smell of

narcissus, the fountains plashing in the level yellow light.

“I should have called round to inquire, after the afflicting occurrence—I hope you don’t feel the glare of the declining sun, Mrs. Dormer? Stand a little to the left, and you will be more in shadow. I should have called to inquire, and to offer—ahem! my sympathy and Mr. Magrath’s under the most distressing circumstances, only you ran away from Nice so quick——”

“We were obliged to run! The Riviera climate never suits my throat after January.”

Mrs. Dormer makes the interruption in a voice desperately at variance with her own.

“Really! Of course, that is some people’s way. In my family we hold it a duty to keep to our post, to live everything down. I dare say I have mentioned to you that I am one of the Treddles, the only family of the name in Great Britain, and all dis-

tinguished, one way or another, for our talents."

Mrs. Dormer's neck acknowledges the possibility by a two-inch bow.

"One of my uncles, the well-known Mr. Samuel Treddles, used to have his joke. 'The only crime that can not be lived down,' my uncle would say, 'is poverty.' But then, that was in England, and Mr. Samuel Treddles was a man of position."

"My dear Joyce, we must walk on. At this time of year no one should be abroad after sunset."

"Indeed, all the Treddles were carriage people. Before marrying Mr. Magrath I was quite in the dining-out set of my mamma's neighbourhood. In these foreign places, ladies, too, without a protector, it is different—flight may have been the best policy! I can assure you, Mrs. Dormer, that we have never lost a chance of publicly expressing

our sympathy with you and your daughter. So prejudicial, as Mrs. Pinto and every one else in the Pension observed, to have an engaged girl's name mixed up with such a notorious character as poor Mr. Tryan."

Mrs. Dormer's severest critics acknowledge that she is a woman who cannot, outwardly, be worsted. Outwardly, she is not worsted at this moment—no, not with solid earth crumbling under her feet, with every dearest hope vanishing in gloomy perspective, with Joyce's eyes, an anguish in them that she feels, rather than reads, fixed full upon her face.

Mrs. Dormer is not worsted. She is an epitome of statuesque fine breeding, holding its own against vulgar assumption, ill-judged sympathy; a model that might almost be held classic in that supreme social art called, in our nervous Saxon idiom, the art of giving the cold shoulder.

“Agreeable to have renewed *one’s acquaintance*,” by how wide a gulf do the italics divide the term from friendship, “in this casual way. After Easter Mr. Dormer will be in Rome. It is possible one may have more time for visiting than at present. We hope sincerely that the invalid will continue to make satisfactory progress, and—and *good evening*, to you, Mrs. Magrath. We must run home with all haste, Joyce, unless we would have the Borghese malaria overtake us.”

CHAPTER X.

BLUE SILK AND COBWEBS.

JOYCE walks quietly back along the Roman streets, thronged and full coloured in this hour of March sunset. She goes through her dinner, or a pantomime of dinner, as usual. She talks about the plans made for to-morrow's sight-seeing, about John Farintyre, at this moment travelling by express train Romeward—her cheeks all the while growing whiter and whiter, her eyes larger, her lips more rigidly unsmiling.

By and by, the time drawing near when Farintyre's arrival may be looked for, calmly, but with a manner only the more vividly in earnest by reason of its calmness, the girl

reverts to their meeting with Mrs. Magrath in the Borghese gardens.

"You heard, of course, what words were spoken, mother. I should like you, before John Farintyre comes, to tell me the meaning of them?"

"And I," answers Mrs. Dormer promptly, "would willingly be spared the pain of recalling Mrs. Magrath or her conversation to my memory. I told you beforehand that we would believe as much only of her Nice gossip as charity permitted."

Joyce moves across into the recess of a window, which she opens, allowing the chill *cattiva aria* of the Roman night to blow upon her face.

"This is not a time, mother, to talk of charity. The burning question for me is *truth*. I am always giving you pain, I know. You dislike going back upon the past, and if it were possible I would never mention

again a name and a subject that can only bring with them bitter discussion."

To this Mrs. Dormer gives quick assent.

"Such silence would be wise. The past is dead and buried, and——"

"But it is not possible," Joyce persists.

"You heard the hints thrown out by Mrs. Magrath. From the expression of your face I believed you read between the lines more clearly than I did. Was it so?"

"I read, too, clearly that Mrs. Magrath's intentions were unamiable," says Mrs. Dormer, gaining time. "I have travelled much, have seen many unlovely types of our poor countrywomen. Mrs. Peter Magrath eclipses them all."

"Still, there must have been a foundation for her hints. She does not approve of me, artistically, perhaps. At Lady Joan Majendie's concert some very weak performance of mine was received by our friends with good-natured

leniency that Mrs. Magrath's finer critical sense would not allow her to endorse. But it is just when people do dislike you that they are moved to tell unpalatable truths. 'Expressions of sympathy . . . distressing circumstances! Prejudicial to have an engaged girl's name mentioned in connection with Mr. Tryan's.'" The words come from Joyce's blanched lips with a gasp. "Can you guess at the drift of all this? Do you see the smallest clue to the meaning of such language?"

"Would it not be politic to regard Mrs. Magrath and her speech as below our notice?"

"No, mother; not at the point where I am standing now. I have got on well, you will say, during the past weeks. There has been so much to see, to think of—and I have done my utmost to forget my own pain, my own wretchedness, in my work. I have tried with a will to keep up from the time we left Nice, as I shall keep up to the last. But it is only

my body that is better. A fever consumes my heart." And saying this she clasps her slight hands together piteously, "Every day since we arrived in Rome—yes, sooner or later, the truth must out—I have expected a letter, a word from Roger Tryan, and none — none has come."

Mrs. Dormer is as unencumbered by old-fashioned prejudices as most people. But as her daughter pleads to her, that inconvenient secretion of the brain, that peculiar arrangement of molecules, called conscience, does prick her sore.

"A letter from Roger Tryan !" she stammers. "Why, you ceased to correspond with Roger Tryan years ago. And under present circumstances—John Farintyre's feelings——"

Mrs. Dormer's own feelings would seem to overcome her. For once, she is actually at a loss for words.

"During the half-hour I was with Mr.

Tryan in the gardens at Monte Carlo we talked of many things," goes on Joyce, still in the same quiet, unnaturally intense voice. "You have never once spoken to me of that meeting, mamma."

"It is a subject about which delicacy has bidden me be silent, child."

"But you must know that Roger and I could not meet without looking back upon our lost happiness. We are young still, mother, Roger Tryan and I! Nothing actually stands between us."

Mrs. Dormer gives an inward shudder. It seems to her as though a spectral figure intervened between her daughter's head and the deep, iron-blue background of night sky.

"And so, after talking of the past, it happened that we found ourselves speculating a little about the future."

"The future of a beggared man."

"Beggary is an elastic term, mamma.

When our engagement was first broken off, Roger Tryan had some means left. He had had a university training, and——”

“Three hundred a year and a degree—to use one word instead of seven, Starvation!”

“But we are talking of the present, of our meeting at Monte Carlo. Roger said enough to make me think he would give up his present associates, and essay a fresh start in life.”

“Fresh starts, as a rule, end in fresh downfalls,” observes Mrs. Dormer, seeking safety in a generalisation.

“That may or may not be true, mamma. In any case,” Joyce adds, with firmness, “we did look forward with something like hope to the years that lie before both of us. And I am glad to remember it. Whatever happens, I shall not break with Roger again as a friend. On that point I am resolved. I shall not break with Roger Tryan again, whatever becomes of my life.”

Mrs. Dormer's face is eloquent, though her lips speak not.

"For I made my peace with him. Roger asked if it was altogether too late for him to move for a new trial, and I promised him a hearing, if he would call on us next morning in Nice. Well, although he never came, although I have had no word or letter from him since, I cannot believe Roger Tryan capable of falseness. . . . Oh, mother," she exclaims, with a sudden change of voice and colour, "is it possible that some new misfortune has come to him? That horrible dream I had at Pisa seems to accord with the hints we heard to-day. . . . Let us look in the arrival list, find out the Magraths' hotel, and hurry there before John Farintyre arrives. Let us learn the worst—or make ourselves sure that there is no worst to learn."

A look of wild terror is on Joyce's face. Her quick, excited movements, her broken utterance, betoken her to be in a mood for any

enterprise of mad, convention-breaking despair. And Mrs. Dormer knows that the moment for decisive action has come. Now is the whole future prosperity of her child's life to be won or forfeited. Now must she, Mrs. Dormer, speak, or for ever after hold her peace.

Crossing the room, she rests her hand warningly on the girl's wrist.

"Have we sunk so low, Joyce, have we so little self-respect left, that we would expose ourselves to the world's cold pity? The Magraths know, what every one in Nice must have known, that you were seen, at Monte Carlo on Mr. Tryan's arm. It was a deplorable imprudence. Vain to hope that idle brains will not speculate, idle tongues comment, when once people begin to set society at defiance!"

"But the questions I asked are not answered, mother. Allow the imprudence, which I do not, of being seen, openly, on Roger Tryan's arm. Where are the 'distressing circum-

stances?' Mrs. Magrath spoke as though some disgrace, some calamity, had befallen us when we left Nice in that hasty fashion. There could be nothing more calamitous in walking along the Monte Carlo terrace with Roger Tryan than with any ordinary acquaintance."

Mrs. Dormer moves aside, sharply. She turns so that only her face in extremest outline, the still rounded cheek, the delicate ear, the tip of nose and of eyelash, can be seen by her daughter.

Such a fraction of a profile as this affords no clue as to whether a person busied on a gigantic embroidery has the grace to blush or not!

"Roger Tryan can never become as an ordinary acquaintance while both of you remain unmarried. The remembrance of your unhappy engagement is too fresh for that. The world, much more the ill-natured section of it, will always look upon a renewal of

intimacy between you with suspicion. I heard long ago, from Lady Joan Majendie, that the fact of your walking across the Monte Carlo salon on Mr. Tryan's arm was severely criticised in Nice. I also heard——”

“Go on, mamma. What did Lady Joan write? Tell the exact story. Do not stop to consider whether your words give me pain or pleasure.”

“I also heard,” proceeds Mrs. Dormer, speaking fast, like one who would fain get an unpleasant task finished, “that Mr. Tryan, after bidding us good-bye, returned to the side of his friend, Mrs. Pinto. There was an entertainment that night, it would seem, in the Pension where Major and Mrs. Pinto live. At this entertainment Roger Tryan appeared—we can believe was exposed to a fire of merciless raillery, for having renewed his acquaintance with ourselves. Remembering an unedifying scene we were forced to witness

on our way to Monte Carlo, you cannot doubt *what* influence would be brought to bear upon him. You cannot desire that on such a theme I should be more explicit?"

Joyce looks faint and sick. She leans her shoulder against the framework of the window for support.

"More explicit? No, mamma, I think I have heard as much as is good for me. Poor little mother," she adds in a softened voice, "so Lady Joan wrote (as she wrote once before in Langen Waldstein); you knew the true state of things all along, only you were too tender, too considerate to tell me. And I . . . ah, the fool that I have been!" Joyce breaks off: remembering, passionately, her walks in the Pincian gardens, the happy omen on the palm-shadowed grass, the hopes, each successive morning, of the letter that came not. "But I am rightly punished. Was my past conduct to Roger so upright that I should

look to be treated with good faith by him now?"

"You should not take everything with such terrible seriousness," says Mrs. Dormer uneasily. "Roger Tryan, of course, knew how matters stood between you and John Farintyre."

"How did they stand, mother? Was I not, virtually, my own mistress? A loophole of escape had been left open. It was decided with John Farintyre, at Clarens, that if either of us saw fit to change before next April it should not be accounted as falsehood."

"Poor John Farintyre!"

Mrs. Dormer turns pale as the ejaculation escapes her.

"You do well to pity him," exclaims Joyce. "We have drifted farther and farther into this loveless engagement, until it seems likely we shall end by marrying—who shall say with what prospect of happiness? But on that

January night, at Monte Carlo, I might have got my freedom without disloyalty. I should have told Roger Tryan so, if he had kept his promise—had called at our lodging—next morning.”

“Roger Tryan acted wisely in staying away.” And these words are brought out by Mrs. Dormer with firmness. “Men view such things in a lighter spirit than we do. As regards that luckless evening, I can quite imagine Roger returning, as a kind of duty, to Mrs. Pinto. She was under his escort, and——”

“And, naturally, would require his attendance throughout the evening. You are right, mamma; I am sure men do not view such things as we do. To waltz at a party presided over by Mrs. Pinto would be a kind of duty. Small wonder Mr. Tryan felt in no mood for calling on us the following morning.”

Joyce stops short. Her face droops forward on her breast, her arms hang nerveless, heavy, at her side.

Still and peaceful is the breath of the Lone Mother on this fair night of southern spring. The stars look calmly down, as they have looked through centuries of bloodshed and of sin, upon mouldering fresco, cypress-shaded convent garden, mosaic-crowned gateway, and yellow-flowing Tiber. The campagna plains, lit by a strip of crescent moon, lie wrapped in the humid sleep which is their beauty and their desolation.

After a long silence, Joyce Dormer rouses herself with a start.

"A lovely evening, is it not, mamma, for John Farintyre's first impressions of Rome? But chill—one almost feels malaria in the wind." She turns away, shivering, from the window and its peaceful outlook. "It must be nearly time for me to think of dressing."

In accordance with their simple, unpretentious habits, Mrs. Dormer and her daughter

are clad in classically draped gray cashmere ; no bows, flounces, furbelows, or other pride of milliners, and horror of artists, marring the gracefully severe effect of their attire.

“To think of dressing ! You are absolutely neat and fresh, child. How could you be more fitly dressed than at present ?”

“I am afraid Mr. Farintyre is not educated up to the point of appreciating fitness,” Joyce remarks. “Mr. Farintyre likes to see me in pale blue silk, poor man, or he fancies so.”

“Pale blue must always be the true complement of a wild-rose complexion. The preference is artistically correct.”

“But scarcely original. At some foolish æsthetic London party, last season, I wore a blue gown, and Mr. Farintyre overheard a speech one degree more foolish than the party, about a goddess and a cloud. He has felt himself safe ever since, under the precedent of another man’s taste.”

"And you mean to wear a blue gown to-night?"

"I mean to do more. Mr. Farintyre has an ideal—we hear of her pretty often! Recollecting Rosie Lascelles before the foot-lights of the Ambiguity, Mr. Farintyre likes to see me heavily loaded with metals. I will put on the one blue silk dress I possess, and the least hideous of the sets he has sent to me, or rather to you, of late, as an adornment."

Mrs. Dormer is ill-satisfied with the girl's tone, with her restless movements, with the feverish glitter of her eyes.

"Look in the mirror, Joyce. Use your own taste, and say if a rustling blue silk, if Bond Street jewellery, will accord as well with our tattered tapestries, our cobwebs, our scagliolo, as the dress you wear?"

"It is high time to leave off thinking of my own taste," is Joyce's answer. "My own taste, up to the present hour, has brought

everything and everybody connected with me to sorrow. Far better—surely, you must agree with me there, mamma—that I began to think of Mr. Farintyre's."

And when, in due course of time, John Farintyre arrives, looking very British, and new, and out of place, in the dusky sixteenth century palazzo, a vision in azure silk, with filigree gold ornaments on throat and wrist, advances to the top of the staircase to meet him.

"Welcome to Rome," murmurs the girl as her cheek, wet with recent tears, rests for one instant upon her lover's waistcoat. "Mamma and I are glad to see you, Mr. Farintyre."

Then she lifts her face up, smiling bravely. And Farintyre, whose instincts are tolerably reliable, knows that Joyce Dormer never loved him less than at this moment.

CHAPTER XI.

A FACE IN THE CROWD.

NEXT day the English-speaking colony in Rome is awakened into quite a new little sensation. Joyce Dormer — *the* blue-eyed, violin-playing Miss Dormer, about whose love affairs, my dear madam, so many and such, conflicting histories have circulated—appears openly in the public places of the city, at John Farintyre's side.

They walk, during the forenoon, in the Borghese gardens; they drive on the Pincian Hill, at the afternoon hour when all the world is there to see; in the evening attend one of the Lenten services in the Sistine chapel, unchaperoned, throughout, by Mrs. Dormer,

and with a manner, on Joyce's side at least, as calmly prosaic as though they were Darby and Joan of half-a-dozen years' standing.

Broken-hearted, designing, victim, or vanquisher—and each version of her history has had its day—one fact is certain now : the girl's sentimental wild oats are sown ! Vaguely, it had already been whispered that the great firm of Sloper and Scamell were engaged upon settlement drawing in Lincoln's Inn ; that ivory satins, Mechlin flounces, were on their road south, from Paris ; orange-flower wreath and bridesmaids' trimmings bespoken at Igenio's of the Via Babaina, here, in Rome. These things were whispers, only : in the present overcharged state of the domestic atmosphere Mrs. Dormer herself not having dared to talk of the marriage as inevitable. John Farintyre's solid, flesh-and-blood advent, his constant, public appearance at Joyce Dormer's side, are facts. The situation becomes crucial. The

English-Roman colony, rousing up after its Lenten quiet, knows a new little sensation !

Is the heroine of the hour sore in her inmost heart, haunted by some ghost of that exceedingly ugly Monte Carlo tragedy ? Anglo-Roman society shakes its wise head at the bare suggestion ! At the present age of the world, young women on the eve of making wealthy marriages are haunted by nothing.

Look at Joyce Dormer's face, at her frequent smiles (she who, when she was happy, smiled so rarely) ; at the carnation on her cheek. The poor girl, of course, is Mrs. Dormer's child. It may be a prejudice—but who does not feel that that very singular china-blue eye can *not* be trusted !

Easter Monday comes, with its usual ringing of bells, roaring of cannon, and explosions of fireworks. Before the day is over gracious little invitation cards go the round

of Mrs. Dormer's more intimate friends. Hapless Mr. Dormer, still with his teapots at Naples, is told, officially, that the pious duty of giving his daughter away in marriage will fall to him next Saturday. On Wednesday, a monster banker's ball is to take place at the Palazzo Orsini, and at this ball Joyce, it is decided, must show herself—positively for the last time, as Joyce Dormer, before the Roman world.

“And I hope, for my sake, you will not come out in a schoolgirl muslin, or dust-coloured serge,” says Mr. Farintyre, as he prepares to take leave of his betrothed, late on the Wednesday afternoon. Joyce's sombre taste is ever a sore point with young Cræsus, who naturally looks upon his sweetheart—poor Cræsus!—as a kind of palpitating block for the display of stones and stuffs. “I like blue for a dinner dress, but to my mind there's nothing shows a girl off in a

ballroom better than pink satin. By George ! you should have seen Rosie Lascelles in hers, that time they were playing the burlesque of Frou-Frou, at the Ambiguity. Surely you have got a pink satin among your trousseau dresses ? ”

Mrs. Dormer has been careful on the point, knowing John Farintyre’s predilection. But Joyce contumaciously declares herself in favour of black. If there is one colour wherein the milliners can make her look more hideous than another, she urges, it is pink.

“ Besides, it is not correct, is it mother—you know the unwritten law on such points—it is not in accordance with doll morality for a spinster to wear one of her matron gowns while she remains a spinster ? ”

“ It would be in accordance with every morality to wear that which pleases John Farintyre,” says Mrs. Dormer, playfully evasive. “ Artistically, the choice is good. Titian and

Rubens show us that the blondes of old, Mr. Browning's dear dead women, wore pinks and crimsons without stint."

Joyce bows her head in submission.

"What ornaments shall go with the artistic choice? Mr. Farintyre, you are fresh from London; teach us. What jewellery did Rosie Lascelles wear with her pink satin, when they burlesqued Frou-Frou at the Ambiguity?"

Farintyre passes his fat fingers through his hair, and advocates pink coral, a magnificent set, bought yesterday by himself, in the Corso. Mrs. Dormer inclines towards Roman pearls, also a gift made by Mr. John Farintyre within the past week.

"We will hold a council of war. Run to your room and bring both cases, Joyce—that is to say, if Smart have not already packed them up."

Until the present hour, it has been Mrs.

Dormer's harmless vanity to boast of her state as unburthened by a lady's maid. What more interesting spectacle (the real Mrs. Dormer would reason within herself about the world's Mrs. Dormer)—what more interesting spectacle than that of a brave-hearted little woman, gifted, graceful, miserably allowed by an unappreciative husband, and having the courage of her opinions—and of her poverty !

But with other times, other manners. No heterodox contempt for £ s. d., no picturesque leaning towards vagabondism, under the reign of Mr. John Farintyre. Cræsus, junior, intends that *his* wife shall start from Rome with an abigail, just as he intends to start with a valet, a courier, and a paragraph in Galignani. "Do our honeymooning in style," wrote the young man, with delicate wit, in one of his more recent letters. And Joyce, passively obedient in all things, now that she has surrendered life itself, accepts Smart, the lady's-

maid, just as she does the bonnets, dresses, haberdashery, and travelling-gear sent out from London for her use.

“We will make up a blaze of fir-cones, ready for the display,” says Mrs. Dormer, approaching the smouldering hearth. Although the Romans call Easter summer, Farintyre’s British love of heated rooms must be ministered to—wood, alas! costing five lire the basket. “Mr. Farintyre, will you help? You are just beginning to master the difficulties of an Italian wood fire.”

Is this sudden interest in Roman pearls and pink coral a pretext—the question suggests itself to Farintyre’s mind—for getting Joyce out of hearing? The moment the girl has left them, Mrs. Dormer crosses to her future son-in-law’s side. She rests her hand with emphasis on his.

“The tension is becoming too great—for you and for me. I shall thank heaven when

Saturday is over,—when our poor darling's peace and happiness are secured."

John Farintyre shifts, ungallantly enough, away. He takes a few sullen paces that echo and re-echo through the carpetless, barely-furnished room.

"I don't see why the 'tension' need exist. In my humble opinion the whole plan of concealment is a mistake." So, after a minute he breaks forth—"Yes, Mrs. Dormer, a deuced mistake."

"It has been successful hitherto, inasmuch as it has stood between Joyce and suffering," puts in Mrs. Dormer.

"And how long do you suppose it can be kept up? Some day or other is Joyce not sure to hear the truth? You say yourself that your life is one long dread. You tremble if you see her speak in the street to a common acquaintance. Well, I have no taste for trembling. I like things on the square. I would

sooner have the truth told to Miss Dormer to-night, than a week hence to Mrs. Farintyre."

"You understand Joyce—not quite as well as I do, Mr. Farintyre! If the . . . the sad Monte Carlo accident which has caused us so much trouble had come to Joyce's knowledge in Nice, she might—one would grieve to say what the dear, generous, unworldly child might *not* have done."

"H'm! And if the sad Monte Carlo accident should come to her knowledge now—I mean, any time after next Saturday?"

"If the story of Roger Tryan's madness should be made known to her after your marriage, Joyce can have only one feeling—sorrow that a man who was our friend, once, should have sunk into the gambler and the duellist." And Mrs. Dormer turns her eyes, very full, very pleadingly, on John Farintyre. "Joyce will remember whose name she bears,

and her own dignity. As a girl she may have been capricious—over-full, I confess, at times, of high-flown Quixotic sentiment. In the heart of a young wife there can be room only for her husband, and for duty.”

John Farintyre looks blankly unmoved.

“Can’t say that I have had much experience of high-flown Quixotic sentiment.” The laugh that accompanies this remark is not a reassuring one. “The young wives one sees about in the world contrive to find place in their hearts for a few things besides duty, or their husbands either, it seems to me.”

“You must not judge of Joyce by the butterfly crowd among whom you have mixed as a bachelor, in fastish London society. Joyce has a heart——”

“Item: a memory,” interrupts Farintyre, with meaning. “Item: a temper—not a forgiving one! She has told me so, often: I respect her the more for it. How will that

temper of Joyce's brook the deceit that has been practised on her?"

"My dear Mr. Farintyre!"

Little Mrs. Dormer really shivers at the coarseness of the expression.

"There are people in Rome, it seems, who know the details of Roger Tryan's wretched business,—who were in Nice at the time when it all took place. Well, I repeat what I said just now. I would sooner some of these people spoke out now, than . . ."

"Hush! not a word of this before her," whispers Mrs. Dormer, returning with quick presence of mind to the hearth, as a step sounds upon the marble, outside. "Why, here is Joyce, back already, and our fir-cones not lighted. And have you brought both sets, my love?" looking round, all smiles and brightness, as the door opens. "Then we will set about our illumination, put ourselves on the seat of judgment, at once."

Not an unsuggestive theme for an artist might be found in the group upon which this illumination rests. The fir-cones' wavering pyramids of flame set forth the subtle lights and shadows of the vaulted Roman room in powerful relief. They flood with transparent ruby Joyce's blonde head and graceful figure, as, kneeling before the fire, she holds aloft one shining bauble after another, towards her mother and Mr. John Farintyre. Not an unsuggestive theme for an artist's pencil: a telling subject, surely, for the moral anatomist, if the hearts of those three persons—so near to each other, and yet so far—could but be laid bare beneath his scalpel!

When the judgment has been passed—Mrs. Dormer, even in the matter of pearls versus coral, gaining her way—when John Farintyre has kissed a farewell upon the cold white hands, which, next Saturday, will legally be his, Joyce pushes pearls and coral away

from her with a gesture of disgust. Her face wears the same strained, absent look that it wore on that fateful evening when she besought her mother to take her to Monte Carlo. She pushes pearls and coral aside; then wearily seating herself beside the fire, utters a moan that startles even Mrs. Dormer out of her bland philosophy.

Most people are familiar with the word "moan" (a convenient rhyme for alone, groan, or stone) in ballads. It is a sound seldom heard amidst the whirl and tumult of this crowded, all-forgetting, everyday life of ours.

"You are over-flushed, my child. I don't like that constant flush upon your cheeks." And Mrs. Dormer's voice is tremulous. Do not the hardest among us pity that which submits more readily than that which rebels! "How would it be to spare ourselves the fatigue of this great Roman ball? We need

all our strength at present—such fluctuating strength as it is !”

Possibly, in her inmost soul, Mrs. Dormer would be thankful to-night of the quiet of her own room ; content to tide safely over another twelve hours in the direction of Saturday’s orange blossoms.

“ I was never better in my life—bodily,” is Joyce’s answer. “ And I am not such a coward as to wish to shirk the ball. I do not sleep much, as you know—the result of my own obstinacy in respect of chloral, perhaps ; and a ball gets rid of a night, or the worst portion of it.”

She clasps her hands above her forehead in such a fashion that her face rests in half-shadow, its expression all but hidden from Mrs. Dormer’s sight.

“ We have agreed only too often during the past two years ”—so, after a space, she resumes—“ that Roger Tryan’s name should

not be mentioned between us. I must break through the resolution this evening, for the last time."

"As you like, Joyce. I am in favour of outspokenness always, still——"

"After Saturday you may be sure I shall never talk . . . we will hope, shall never think, of Roger again. But to-night, for the last time, I am going to weary you with the old forbidden subject. Do you think it *possible*, mamma, that Roger Tryan can be in Rome?"

"God forbid!" exclaims Mrs. Dormer, startled out of her habitual self-command. Then, adroitly collecting herself—"I mean," she hastens to add, "that Mr. Tryan's presence in Rome is of all things the most unlikely. Let me see. What were one's last accounts of him?"

"You should know, mother. You have correspondents in Nice. I have none."

"Lady Joan mentioned some time ago,

surely, that Roger Tryan's friends, those terrible Pintos, had disappeared from the Riviera; Corsica, as far as I can recollect, was said to be their harbour of refuge. To Corsica, no doubt, I . . . I mean . . . possibly,"—Mrs. Dormer has the grace to falter,—“Roger Tryan may have accompanied them.”

Joyce upon this looks up, a world of restrained, bootless yearning in her eyes.

“If Roger Tryan be in Corsica, it is certain—I told you the same thing that night in Pisa, mother—that some uncanny gift of second sight must be coming to me. For on Friday evening last I saw him.”

“Impossible!”

“Mr. Farintyre, as you know, had taken me to hear the Tenebræ at the Sistine Chapel. It was near the end of the service. The psalms had been chanted, the lights, save one, extinguished. As the long-drawn pianissimo notes of the Miserere were wailed forth in

saddest minor, even the fainting, struggling mass of English ladies became silent. Just then, mother, I caught sight of a face, deadly white, against the black-hung wall, but as plain to me as Michael Angelo's Last Judgment, at which, till then, I had been looking. That face was Roger's."

"I repeat, Joyce, that it is impossible. This kind of talk is idle."

Happily for Mrs. Dormer the fire's blaze has well-nigh died. Joyce cannot detect the ghastly colour of her cheeks.

"Yes, I know all that you would say, all that Lady Joan Majendie has written. Roger Tryan at this moment is in Corsica, in the society of his friends, the terrible Pintos! As far as facts go, you may be right, mother. Yet none the less did I see Roger's face—altered, hollow-cheeked, with eyes that seemed looking back at me from another world—among the crowd who listened

to the chanting of the Miserere on Friday night."

Mrs. Dormer is bending over the scanty warmth of the dying fire. She holds a pair of guiltily trembling hands towards its embers.

"If you do not cure quickly of your 'second sight' I shall advise John Farintyre to consult a physician the moment you reach London. . . . Charming," she goes on, rallying with a strong effort, "to see how the poor fellow studies your every wish! This little Park Lane nest will be so delightful until you can look about together for something permanent!"

A few days before—on the morning, I believe, after attending that Good Friday service—Joyce, in some moment of unusually frank dejection, confessed herself tired of Italy, of sight-seeing; and Farintyre (or shall we say Mrs. Dormer?) telegraphed instantly to secure a furnished London house, no matter how small,

so that it abutted on fashion and the parks, for the season.

“London has never been delightful to me latterly, mother, but I daresay it will seem a relief after Italy. There will be clubs in London, and Hurlingham, and city intelligence, and the Derby to look forward to. I feel that I could never go through the strain of foreign travelling without you to amuse Mr. Farintyre.”

Mrs. Dormer laughs gaily, all her cool self-possession restored to her.

“In the days of our great-grandmothers there used to be a weird institution called the travelling bridesmaid. Would you wish it revived under the still weirder form of the travelling mother-in-law?”

“It would be selfish to hinder you from going on to Naples, mother. Yet I think I shall need you more than papa can. Papa has his bric-à-brac hunting to amuse him, his

teapots and snuff-boxes to keep him company, and I——”

“ You are in a lowered condition of health, my dear Joyce. As soon as you reach town Mr. Farintyre must take you to this Norwegian specialist whom everybody talks about. He finds a name for your disorder merely by touching certain nerves, treats his patients by ‘chemico-psychology’ throughout the London season, and in August packs them off for ozone and shell-fish to Nordeney. In these fitful nervous affections doctors walk, I suspect, in the dark. The empiricists have as much chance of success as the men of science.”

“ But are you quite sure my affection comes under the head of ‘nervousness,’ mother?”

“ Quite positively sure,” answers Mrs. Dormer, this time without a change of colour. “ The brain is anæmic—pending Nordeney and shell-fish—would no doubt profit by iron

or phosphorus from the druggist's. In this nineteenth century, when denizens of the world begin to see visions and dream dreams, it behoves us to think of tonics."

Which may be taken as little Mrs. Dormer's last utterance in the matter of sentiment.

CHAPTER XII.

FATA MORGANA.

THE Orsini Easter ball — a time-honoured fairy piece, almost as familiar to Roman sight-seers as the feet-washing of the pilgrims, the fireworks of St. Angelo, or the showing of relics in St. Peter's! As night advances, the usual outside crowd gazes upon the usual pageant of torch-illuminated colonnades, balconies wreathed in exotic flower bloom, busts and statues quivering under rose-coloured light. In the ballroom, with its mirror-lined walls, its polished oaken floor, its classic colossal Hercules, is a mob of over three hundred guests. Bearded artists, bored milors, New York beauties, violet-robed

churchmen—everybody worth seeing, everybody worth speaking to in Rome, gathered together in the noblest reception-rooms, made welcome by the most charming host and hostess, in the world.

And Joyce Dormer, next Saturday's bride-elect, in her pink satin and pearls, and a dead heart within her breast! Joyce Dormer, the all-unconscious heroine of that tragic story whereof men speak in whispers and women behind their fans, is, from the moment of her arrival, the living epigram, the little dramatic interest of the hour!

Coming forward, with a not too easy air of ownership, John Farintyre claims the hand of his betrothed for the ensuing dance.

"Seems like getting back to the land of the living—have shaken off that confounded sense of chilliness for the first time since I came to Rome." He remarks this as the orchestra strikes up the opening notes of the

third waltz. With politic discretion, Mrs. Dormer has contrived to arrive as late as courtesy to her hostess will allow. "Chapels and tombs and catacombs may be jolly places enough if you have a taste for them. I have not. Never distinguished myself in classics in my youth. Prefer humanity. Prefer the society of my fellow-creatures."

"That is a very prettily-turned bit of flattery," says Joyce. "Remember, Mr. Farintyre—I went with you to every chapel, tomb, and catacomb that you have visited."

"And you are with me to-night, are you not?" he retorts. "How could anything be enjoyable"—it is very rare for John Farintyre to hazard so direct a compliment—"without you?"

She lifts her glance to his, and smiles, the cold, dutiful smile that she has trained her lips since the evening of Farintyre's arrival into wearing.

"But I don't class Rome among things

to be enjoyed. One may not dislike a turn along the Corso," says Mr. Farintyre liberally, "or the place with the little stalls and the music—what do you call it?—the Pincian." Joyce thinks, dimly repugnant, of her walks there in the wild freshness of the spring morning, of the smell of the violets, of the palm-shadow where she daily read a prophecy of Roger's coming letter. "But give me Piccadilly. I know Paris and Vienna and New York—what are they against London? I would sooner walk down Piccadilly than see the pictures of all the Louvres, the marbles of all the Vaticans, in the world. Doosed glad I shall be to get away from pictures and marbles too," he passes his arm around his betrothed's slim waist, "after Saturday."

Joyce makes answer with honestly unintentional sarcasm.

"If your Roman experiences had been wider, you might have been less bored. Fox-

hunting exists here, Mr. Farintyre, and hurdle-races are ridden by real English jockeys. People who like such amusements picnic to Metulla's tomb, and light up the Coliseum with Chinese lamps; and on Thursdays, I believe, you may go in a party to Tivoli by tram. Besides, if you had belonged to the club, you could have as much cards and billiard-playing as you chose. Don't run away with the idea that pictures and marbles and the Vatican constitute Rome."

Her tones are friendly, her lips still wear the cold and dutiful smile. But as they float off together, next Saturday's bride and bridegroom, among the throng of waltzers, the old feeling of jealous suspicion corrodes John Farintyre's peace. Never has Joyce appealed more directly to his sense of physical admiration than she does to-night. Classically falling draperies, sad-coloured artistic fitness, are not for all men's comprehension, certainly

not for John Farintyre's. Could tastes, like votes, be polled, would John Farintyre be in the majority or minority? He likes the brilliant shimmer, the soft frou-frou of a Paris-made pink satin, with a train reaching half way across a ballroom, and a waist that is a libel on anatomy; likes to see the white arms of the future Mrs. Farintyre bared to the shoulder, likes to see *his* gift of pearls shining on throat and wrist, and among the delicate braids of her blonde hair.

And still, at this moment—yes, as he feels her soft breath on his face, as he clasps her waist, her hand—he knows that he holds *her* not! He knows that the finest, keenest part of Joyce Dormer will never belong to him, that she has thoughts, emotions, likings, contempts, that no effort of his—no, nor even the balance of Farintyre senior, at the banker's—will ever enable him to share.

How if he had chosen a commonplace,

faulty, flesh-and-blood woman, say of the type of Rosie Lascelles, for his wife, admitting it be needful—he will only be four-and-twenty next autumn—for him to marry at all? A Rosie Lascelles—nay, even such a woman as Mrs. Dormer (and, heaven knows, Mrs. Dormer has brains enough)—would not answer as much above your head as this girl does, would not look you through and through as these blue eyes, so piteously transparent, so infinitely sad in their unwitting cynicism, have the power to look!

Thus ponders next Saturday's bridegroom. Mrs. Dormer, meanwhile, watches the lovers from afar, with a heart almost light. This ballroom vision of Joyce, as a doll, her hair not innocent of curling-irons, her silken skirts trimmed by Parisian fingers, with the exactly orthodox number of flounces, her arms and throat out-rivalling the pearls they wear—this artificial vision, I say, seems so much likelier

of becoming John Farintyre's wife than the real Joyce Dormer has looked of late, in sombre morning-dress, with hair drawn negligently from her pale and yearning face, and with her Stradiuarius, Roger Tryan's gift, between her hands.

What a magnificent creature the dear child will become in another year or so, can she but cease to fret over a certain lamentable piece of past folly, and fill out physically and morally ! How well suited will she be for the world and for wealth ! No mother of fine culture, delicate feeling, could endure to see her daughter make a traffic of affection. The bare thought were repulsive. One's desire is—that a daughter shall subordinate whim to reason, the present to the future. A woman's youth, let her complexion wear as it will, is over before five-and-thirty. Sentiment belongs to youth. Should not the sober half-century that comes after marriage be printed in larger letters on

life's programme than the half-dozen intoxicated years—fullest of bitterness, often, when fullest of love—that go before ?

Mrs. Dormer watches the brilliant, silk-clad vision as it floats round in Farintyre's arms, with a heart all but lightened of anxiety. When the waltz is over, she has the added pleasure of seeing her daughter hemmed in by a crowd of dancing-men, Roman princes, Russian attachés, an English duke even—all the "best men," feels Mrs. Dormer, with honourable maternal pride, in the room.

Joyce surrenders her card, with her late learnt cold smile, to each aspirant partner in turn, displaying no more warmth in the matter than she displayed in the choice of Roman pearls and pink coral this afternoon. Another and another—why, the girl is having an ovation. Reckoning in the dances reserved, by right, for our excellent John Farintyre, her

card must be full. This evening may be considered *safe*.

Scarcely has Mrs. Dormer had time to mentally italicise the word, when an opening among the crush of non-dancers reveals to her, at a few yards' distance, Mr. and Mrs. Magrath, the insignificant British couple mainly through whose whispers Joyce has become the heroine of a tragic history in Rome. And for an instant little Mrs. Dormer, overborne by a presage of evil stronger than her courage, feels strength forsake her. An instant only! Then crossing the intervening space of polished floor with the airiest satin-slippered tread, she accosts and disarms the lady with a compliment.

Overjoyed to see that Mrs. Magrath has come prepared. For Peter, a poor little hectic man, whose head barely reaches his wife's shoulder, carries a large roll of music-paper conspicuously. In every way desirable that ballroom frivolities should be seasoned by the

intellectual pleasure of good music. A pity amateurs are so sensitive, can so seldom be induced to delight *the few*, at these large mixed parties.

“My wife has all the attributes of genius, madam,” says Mr. Magrath inflatedly. “Ye may nae be aware that my Gerty, before she married me, was a Treddle. One of the celebrated Treddles. A whole family, madam, of geniuses. My Gerty feels nane o’ the ridiculous backwardness in performing which is the bane of your raw amateur. Ye havena heard her in Bark?” Thus does Mr. Magrath style the master of Passion Music. “Then ye have a real treat in store. The musical Albert Dürer, some call Bark, just as others call Handel the musical Holbein. An artist by profession told me in London awhile back, he didna rightly appreciate what counterpoint meant until he heard Mrs. Peter Magrath in Bark. And the astounding thing is, my Gerty

is gude a' round, wi' the voice or the piano. Gude in the delicious Italian phrases of Rossini,"—this is how the poor little husband canters through his lesson,—“or in the exquisite arpeggios, the delicate chromatic sinuosities, of Chopin.” Mr. Magrath pronounces it Shopping.

The delicate, chromatic sinuosities of Shopping.

To her last hour, Mrs. Dormer's memory will, I think, retain these parrot-like, pompous words. So, without will or effort of our own, do we bear about with us the nature-printed pattern of a wall-paper, the colour of a carpet that trivially arrested our eyes at a moment when some key-note of happiness or of despair was abruptly struck.

As Mr. and Mrs. Magrath pass away into the crowd—and for ever from the boards of this little drama—a slight change of position brings her daughter into Mrs. Dormer's sight.

Joyce is on the arm of the young Baron Orsini, the elder son of the house; John Farintyre, a certain dismissed look on his heavy face, vanishing through portals wreathed with orange flower and stephanotis into the hospitable refuge of a neighbouring refreshment-room. So much, with a lightning glance, Mrs. Dormer sees, undisturbed in conscience. All, still, goes well. A minute later, and her cheek flushes—pales! Her heart, under its silks and laces, beats; in a tumult of sudden fear. On Joyce's other side . . . ah, evil omen! inscribing his name on the girl's card . . . Mrs. Dormer recognises young Hugh Longmore, the chance-made Clarens acquaintance to whom, simply in that he was disliked of Farintyre and liked of Joyce, poor, obscure, and in every possible way unprofitable, she hoped that they had long ago bidden good-bye for ever.

Of what peril may not his ill-timed advent

to-night be the forerunner? Without an instant's hesitation, Mrs. Dormer makes her way across the salle to her daughter—the gracefulest, most self-poised little woman that ever threaded a ballroom crowd! She gives young Longmore a friendly, unsuspecting glance from her soft eyes. She extends to him two fingers of each slim, primrose-gloved hand.

This, indeed, reads like a fairy story! Did she not tell Mr. Longmore in Clarens that Italy was the true country of the Fata Morgana? All roads lead to Rome, and all friends seem to travel these roads if we wait long enough. So pleased to renew one's very short Swiss acquaintance. Mr. Longmore would, no doubt, be making some stay in Rome? A few days, only. Every hour, therefore, will be of value. It would be quite too selfish to talk to Mr. Longmore of morning calls. A Lancers—is this indeed a

Lancers that we see forming? Then Joyce and her partner must hold themselves pledged to a vis-à-vis. Mrs. Dormer has promised to walk through one square dance with Prince d'Orellana. Will Joyce and the Baron think it *terribly hard* to have two old people in their set?

Her smooth honied tone puts Longmore designedly in the cold, just as it used to do in those Clarens days when the young Oxonian was first tumbling, headlong and hopelessly, into love. The moment the lad has bowed himself into the background Mrs. Dormer contrives to whisper words the reverse of honied into Joyce's ear.

"Mr. Longmore's recognition of us is an indiscretion. I make it a personal request that you do not encourage him. For a girl in your position over-great popularity is not dignified. It is my wish that you do not dance with everybody to-night."

A glance almost of the old mirth flashes from Joyce's eyes.

"Dance with everybody, mother? Considering that there are three hundred and fifty people gathered together here, would not such a feat border on the miraculous?"

"I am in no humour for jest. Amiability requires that you should give a few dances to our intimate friends"—oh, Mrs. Dormer, what of the Roman princes, the Russian attachés, the English duke?—"the few dances John Farintyre can be expected to resign. You will not, I hope, dance with any mere acquaintance, above all with an hotel-made acquaintance, like this young Longmore?"

"This young Longmore did not seem eager to have such greatness thrust upon him," says Joyce. "Something must have happened, I fear, to shatter our friend's good opinion of us. I was obliged to send Mr. Farintyre across the room as ambassador

before I could get this young Longmore to vouchsafe a look of recognition at all."

Mrs. Dormer's colour deepens. A hasty word escapes her without her will.

"Impertinent! If Mr. Longmore's feelings have so cooled — the better for Mr. Longmore! You will be spared the trouble of telling him your card is full. The young man, of course, has not asked you for a dance?"

"Uncertain whether the young man asked me, or I the young man," is Joyce's answer. "In any case, Hugh Longmore's initials are written on my card opposite number eleven—the quadrille, mamma, that you and Mr. Farintyre have agreed to dance together."

Mrs. Dormer groans in the spirit, yet has she no choice save to accept such bitter irony of facts as may be presented to her. Joyce, already, is moving into position with the Baron; her own princely partner, starred,

ribboned, decrepit, advances across the room to claim his Lancers. Two or three minutes later, and the sets have formed.

Graceful, smiling, younger looking than her daughter, this more than Spartan mother reaps a harvest of admiration as she glides, with girlish airiness, through the figures. She makes the round of the ballroom, chattering soft nothings in her singularly correct Italian, and leaning on old Prince d'Orellana's arm. After this, follow two round dances, danced, from first to last, by Joyce, with successive notabilities. Poor Mrs. Dormer! those dances might well be called her Waterloo, the winding up and finish of all maternal triumph! Then comes number eleven, the number opposite to which certain objectionable initials are written on Joyce's card, the quadrille which John Farintyre has dutifully promised to dance with his future mother-in-law.

For a time there seems hope that young Longmore may have awakened to some sense of his own impertinence—in existing! He is nowhere to be seen among the dancing crowd, is not among the men who cluster, in attitudes of greater or less weariness, around open doorways. At the eleventh hour, when most of the quadrille sets have formed, he reappears with the air of a man on duty rather than on pleasure bent, walks across to Joyce, who, in spite of her mother's counsels, has remained faithfully partnerless, and offers her his arm.

“Your Oxford friend, Longmore of Corpus, is determined not to lose sight of us,” remarks Mrs. Dormer, as Farintyre leads her away: delicately mindful of his future parent's taste, John Farintyre has organised a set containing at least four titled or notable personages at the upper end of the room.

“Yes, and deuced white Longmore of

Corpus looks, sullen as a bear, too—no getting an answer when Joyce insisted upon my speaking to him. What human motive could the man have in turning up here in Rome at such a time !”

“The old story, perhaps, of Lochinvar. Mr. Longmore has come to ‘tread but one measure, drink one cup of wine,’” cries Mrs. Dormer prettily.

The suggestion, did John Farintyre follow it, were surely a risked one. Longmore and Joyce tread no measure, it is true, drink no cup of wine. At this moment, however, they are vanishing from the ballroom by a garden-window, into scarcely orthodox darkness.

“Joyce behaved with admirable tact, with the greatest circumspection, during our stay in Clarens. Still, I am half afraid that the poor boy’s peace was endangered on the night of that momentous storm. It might be kind

to include him among our wedding guests on Saturday?"

But Mrs. Dormer's mind is not quite as tranquil as the airy tones of her voice would betoken.

CHAPTER XIII.

JOYCE HEARS THE TRUTH.

THE northern windows of the Palazzo Orsini open upon a vast inner court. Around this court, on three sides, runs a covered colonnade. Beyond are vistas of garden, from whence myrtle and lemon odours steal delicately through the midnight gloom. In the background rises the city—roofs, domes, and cupolas vaguely discernible against a starless sky.

For awhile Joyce Dormer and Longmore talk well within the bounds of dulcet inanity. Then abruptly the girl goes back to her old outspoken tone of frank companionship.

“Confess that your opinions of us have changed, Mr. Longmore—that you had no very strong wish of renewing our acquaintance? I promise not to be offended,” she adds. “It was an understood thing between you and me from the first that we should tell each other the truth.”

“And you are so used to sweets that a wholesome bitter might prove piquant,” says Hugh Longmore. “Men who live too long in Italy get surfeited, I am told, of sunshine and blue skies. Miss Dormer has been fed upon flattery until it palls.”

“You have the gift of insight,” returns Joyce quietly. “Miss Dormer is so accustomed to happiness that she would be glad—oh, glad of the sensation of pain, as a new experience! Is this intended as your answer, Mr. Longmore? You did *not* mean to recognise mamma and me to-night, if I would have allowed you to cut us?”

“I meant, when I came here, to stop half-an-hour at most,” is Longmore’s answer. “A friend I have in Rome offered to get me an invitation. I accepted—if I am to speak truthfully—because I heard Miss Dormer was to be the interest of the evening! But I came as a spectator only, in no mood for pleasure. I saw you and Mrs. Dormer surrounded by your friends. Why should you be troubled by an obscure, chance-made acquaintance like myself?”

“When facts are unpleasant I like them told in few words. You meant to cut me, Mr. Longmore?”

“I waited, intending that the recognition should come from you, certainly.”

Joyce Dormer’s next question is put in a quick, short voice, unlike her own.

“And what has changed you towards us? You were hurt, perhaps, that I never wrote to you as I promised? Alas, it seems I have

done no one thing that I ought this past winter. When we were at San Remo the days went by in a sort of feverish dream. During our short stay at Nice every hour was disposed of beforehand. Our afternoons were given to visit-paying, our evenings wasted at parties——”

“Occasionally, perhaps, in visits to Monte Carlo?” interrupts Longmore, with meaning. “Pray, Miss Dormer, make no excuse. I did not seriously think you would write to me, even when you were so bored by the dullness of lakes and mountains as to promise it.”

“And did you care, very much, about my silence?”

The question is temerous ; from the lips of a vainer woman than Joyce Dormer might savour of coquetry.

“I ‘cared’—just so much,” exclaims Longmore without a second’s hesitation, “that for weeks—yes, Miss Dormer, for weeks and months

—the hour before the arrival of the foreign post seemed to myself the only hour in which I rightly lived out of the twenty-four. Is that answer plain enough ?”

Joyce shrinks before the expression of his eyes. She trifles, as if in absent mood, with her bouquet, a stiffly artificial disc of Parmesan violets, across the centre of which her monogram is worked in wired orange flowers ; a gallantry, of course, of Mr. Farintyre’s.

“ Among social arts, the art of friendship should, I am sure, be reckoned one of the hardest.” The forced remark is made after a space of awkward silence. “ Evidently I have not learned the rudiments of it. Every friend I have drops away from me. And still, as regards you, Mr. Longmore, I thought in Clarens—— ”

“ Clarens belongs to the past, is for ever done with,” he interrupts her brusquely. “ There is no recollection, Miss Dormer, that a

man's will may not, in time, help him to stamp out."

"Do you wish to stamp out the recollection of Clarens? To me that stay at the Pension Scherer seems something altogether to the good, a few summer days, the thought of which will carry refreshment with it, whatever happens. I could not, if I chose, forget that evening when you and I took a walk in the direction of Glion. Mamma and Mr. Farintyre preferred playing cards by lamplight in the hotel, so we went out alone. You were patient enough, I remember, to give me a lesson in astronomy."

The first evening—when they talked of Arcturus, and chlorophyl, and Beethoven! The evening when, after an hour spent together in the ampler ether, the pale Elysian light, Longmore felt as though he and Joyce Dormer had been acquainted for years. Does he believe, in truth, that this recollection

can ever come within the power of will to stamp out?

“And our pleasant afternoons on the terrace, one, especially, when we talked of Werther and Charlotte, and you read the Prisoner of Chillon aloud! And our disastrous expedition to Lord Byron’s island! And all the music, a little too much of that, perhaps, to which mamma and I made you listen!”

Joyce’s voice is earnest, fraught with sincere and kindly feeling. In her gleam of satin and shimmer of pearls she is looking fair enough to cause the distraction of many a colder-blooded man than Hugh Longmore. But the young Oxonian’s heart beats no quicker. Admiration, reverence for Joyce Dormer have turned in him to something closely bordering on hatred—hatred, shall we say, in theory! The practical onlooker in these matters may be allowed to doubt the

personal aversion of a man of three-and-twenty towards a beautiful girl (however heartless) whose finger-tips rest on his arm, whose breath mingles with his own in the mystic, odorous atmosphere of a Roman night.

"If I wished it, which I do not," she repeats, "I could never, while I live, forget our charming August days in Clarens."

They have, by this time, reached an extreme angle of the colonnade. The sounds of horns and fiddles and moving feet come to them faintly. A fountain, lit by one quivering lamp, plays in the adjacent orange garden : its splash, heard through the darkness, recalls to Hugh Longmore the far-away lap of Lake Geneva, as he heard it in a moment of intoxication, a moment when two cold little thyme-scented hands were held abruptly across his face.

"One does not, literally, forget the happiest hours of one's lifetime," he remarks with courage. "But one may learn to look back

upon them without the old, mad, crushing regret. That is all I dare trust myself to say, with my present feelings. I can look back without crushing regret upon those too sweet summer days that I spent in Clarens."

Joyce's fingers quit her companion's arm. She turns from him with a gesture of real pain.

"Everything in my life has got a warp in it. Even you, Mr. Longmore, of whom we know so little, of whom all that we did know was pleasant, have no wish to continue our friend. The Fata Morgana, my mother talks of, is against me, I suppose."

"Is not the Fata Morgana pretty much what we elect to make it?" says Hugh Longmore. "One of us chooses ambition, riches, a balance at his bankers! Another, belonging to a hopeless minority, is so old-fashioned as to prefer love—even although love be accompanied by the bitter disgrace of poverty."

At the tone in which this remark is made Joyce's heart turns sick.

"I believe human beings never understand each other well enough to pronounce hard-and-fast judgments," she answers, almost humbly. "How much, at this hour, does Mr. Hugh Longmore know of Joyce Dormer? That she plays the violin up to the average of dilettante players, has blue eyes, pale hair, a trick of manner——"

He interrupts her with sudden, undisguised passion.

"A trick of manner! Ay, and a low musical voice and a smile . . . and a pair of white hands! That is all I know, is it not? I am ignorant of Miss Dormer's depth of feeling, her generosity, her compassion towards the friend who valued her slightest caprice more than his own life, her grief, her tenderness for this friend in his hour of need?"

Joyce stands like one bewildered; Long-

more's words ringing, meaningless, in her ears, that most cruel of all fears, the fear of the unknown, taking vague possession of her.

“You wonder at seeing me in Rome, no doubt? Well, I will confess to you my reason for coming here. Last August an illness fell upon me—no mortal illness, but one that I could not shake off, as men and women of robuster sense are able to do. When I left England, ten days ago, it was with the hope of getting back to health. If I could only see a certain face that haunted me, press a certain hand before it passed for ever into another man's keeping, I felt that my recovery might be quicker. It was horrible weakness,” says the poor lad, pulling himself together with an effort. “My life is not one of dreams, but of work, certainly is not a life in which twenty or thirty pounds can be thrown away, for a whim, on railway travelling. But, even as late as a fortnight

ago, I judged of things, crookedly. Men blinded by love do not measure the extravagance of their own projects. And you know, Miss Dormer," in spite of himself Hugh Longmore's voice trembles with excess of feeling, "I *was* in love—why should I seek to hide it, until——"

"Until?" repeats Joyce mechanically, as he pauses.

"Until I reached Nice," he answers her, with emphasis. "There my folly was cured, my sight restored to me, but by curiously different means to those upon which I had speculated. From Nice, as you may imagine, I paid a visit to Monte Carlo."

His tone is significant: a glow of indignation is on his young and honest face. But Joyce betrays no faintest sign of answering consciousness.

"I also went to Monte Carlo once," she answers simply. "One January evening I took a

wild fancy for seeing the 'professors of the speculative sciences' at home, and poor mamma was argued into humouring me. It proved an absolute mistake, the worst spent evening of my life. I never want to see, to think of, the Monte Carlo gambling-tables again."

Her quiet self-command, the cold, resigned sadness of her voice, cause Hugh Longmore's indignation to wax hotter.

"Monte Carlo should be a scene rich in dramatic material, Miss Dormer. At Monte Carlo, if anywhere, the artist nature should be able to play at emotion, should find the 'stuff' for inspiration of which you talked to me that night of the storm off Chillon. Surely such an array of lost souls," exclaims Longmore, "men without honour, women bereft of womanhood, might be the subject-matter for some prettily plaintive Song without Words—some adagio in a minor key?"

The way in which this is spoken, rather

than the speech itself, wounds Joyce like a deserved reproach.

“I am afraid I thought too much of myself to observe others on that unfortunate evening. I was full of trouble. There was no need for me to play at emotion or search for dramatic ‘stuff’! Looking back on it all now, the crowd of faces round the tables seems hardly distincter than the background of a bad dream.”

“Still, although you did not see, you must have heard,” goes on Longmore, with persistence. “A child could not visit Monte Carlo and remain innocently obtuse to Monte Carlo realities. Why, the stories of the suicides alone, Miss Dormer—did they not touch you?”

“I heard no such stories. I was selfishly absorbed in my own thoughts during the whole of our stay in Nice.”

“Yet their numbers are legion. Two nights before I was at Monte Carlo,” proceeds

Longmore, still narrowly watching his companion's face, "some miserable creature blew his brains out, as he sat at one of the trente-et-quarante tables. For a little moment the play stopped. Then the attendants carried out the poor wretch's body, and the croupiers went on with their work of shuffling and cutting. What was the first impulse among the crowd of gamblers?—to speculate, perhaps, as to whether the dead man had left parents, a wife, children? Not a bit of it. Before the body was well outside the salle four or five persons were quarrelling over the chair on which the suicide sat, believing that to secure it, the victim's blood literally upon their hands would bring them luck."

"The world overpowers us," cries Joyce, her cheeks turning white with horror. "We are too heavily weighted, each of us, secretly, to think as we should of the burthens of others."

“Except in an artistic spirit,” says young Longmore. “An artist stooping to conquer inspiration might ‘batter himself into sympathy’—who was it invented that charming phrase?—even over the nameless graves that fill a corner in the Nice burying-ground. You must have heard something about the Frenchman who hung himself at the Hôtel Printemps? That was in January, a short time, as far as I could make out, before Mrs. and Miss Dormer started for Rome.”

Joyce Dormer shudders.

“You are determined that I shall sup full on horrors, Mr. Longmore. If my poor mother, with her distaste for the sensational, could hear our talk!”

“Mrs. Dormer must find that the sensational forces itself occasionally upon her notice.”

“When it does, mamma contrives to poetise facts. Never was human soul so apt to

discover the silver lining in all clouds as hers."

"A wise optimism. I am brought back to my unfinished story. The landlord of the Hôtel Printemps was a philosopher, bent upon seeing the brightest, best-paying aspect of the most tragic events. 'Thank heaven, M. de Morigny chose a long cord.' Such were his reported words when they broke into the dead man's room next morning. And every gambler in the neighbourhood rushed to buy a little morsel of the rope—the surest of all talismans to carry with them to the tables. Next in interest to the suicides, I fancy, come the duels."

Longmore pronounces the word with slow emphasis, then stops short, his glance riveted on Joyce's face.

She has turned so that the lamp beside the fountain streams on her full. He can see that her colour deepens not, that

her blue eyes give back his gaze with perfect steadfastness.

“I thought duels had gone out of fashion, were only fought now-a-days by Parisian editors over political articles, or well-padded German students who have exchanged a ‘*dummer Bube!*’ in the street. Men go to Monte Carlo, I have heard, to win fortunes and stay to lose them. Do they quarrel with old Madame Blanc—she still lives, does she not?—or with the croupiers, or between themselves?”

“Surely that is an unnecessary question for you to ask!”

“Unnecessary?”

“You cannot have forgotten the event which was the talk of all Nice no longer ago than last January?”

Joyce moves uneasily away. She believes, on Lady Joan Majendie’s showing, that Roger Tryan is in Corsica; that her dream in Pisa,

her vision of a haggard face in the Sistine, were phantoms—the result of faulty assimilation, of an anæmic brain! And still, although no faintest suspicion of the truth has dawned upon her, she feels ill at rest; conscious that if Longmore has heard so much Monte Carlo news he must have heard more of Roger, possibly of Roger's relations with Major and Mrs. Pinto, than he may choose to admit.

“I am afraid mamma and I are scandalously indifferent to gossip. We hear of startling events about six months after other people have grown tired of discussing them. With the exception of those hurried days in Nice our winter was spent in solitude. Latterly—I mean,” adds Joyce, recollecting herself, “before Mr. Farintyre arrived in Rome—I have had no thought for anything but my music. If time had been longer,” she goes on, after a little silence, “I should like to have had your

opinion on my work. I am dabbling in composition still."

"The last of your Songs without Words, I remember, was to be called Shipwreck. When I met you in Clarens your sympathy was still with the people who commit fiascoes. Mrs. Dormer's advice has, of course, prevailed. After the stereotyped andante movement, a discursive minor passage or two, you have ended everything cheerfully in the resumption of the major key?"

"The song has grown out of all proportions, and is more desperately mournful than ever. You recollect the story about Paganini's violin—how it was said that the virtuoso had killed his mother, and that her soul used to speak to him through the strings? The soul of something dead has been speaking to me, here, in Rome, through the strings of my Stradivarius."

"And what," asks Longmore, staggered

by her calmness, "is to be the title of this new inspiration, this translation into words of a voice from the dead?"

"Oh, I am constant to old names. The song shall be called Shipwreck if the time ever comes when it is rightly finished. During the past week or two," she adds, with a sigh, "I have begun to think that my musical days are numbered. My life would be more in tune if I were to lay my Stradiuarius on a shelf, send it, perhaps, as an addition to the old violins at South Kensington, and never play, never compose another note."

The sincerity of Joyce's voice is not to be questioned. Callous, worldly, devoid of pitying womanly kindness though Longmore believe her, he can with difficulty remain untouched before the pathos of her self-contempt.

"Such a course might be a prudent one," he remarks presently. "If sweet sound, as men say, be the great awakener of memory, it may


be well for one's peace, Miss Dormer, when the past is somewhat dark, to let sweet sound go!"

"Yes, I feel that, only too keenly," cries the poor girl, ignorant of his meaning. "Still, music reminds me, often, that my memory is inconveniently good, and then—then I turn coward, ready to say, 'Sufficient for the day is the frivolity thereof,' to live the life of the world, and put aside all the hopes of excellence I once had for ever."

"To look for the silver—perhaps one might fitly say the golden—lining to the cloud. Admirable philosophy!"

"No true inborn artist could ever turn coward. True artists must wish to keep memory alive, no matter at what cost of happiness, must be willing to endure the acutest suffering, so long as it brought out the best expression of the best feeling that was in them."

Then Joyce is silent; her face downbent in transparent half shadow, her clasped arms



resting, with the grace that informs her smallest movement, upon the rose-twined marble balustrade. Far away, the fiddles and horns clang merrily ; here, at hand, is the soft splash of the fountain. Across the garden rise the dim outlines of sleeping Rome. Faint streaks of dying moonlight linger upon the far horizon. The portents of coming storm lower overhead.

A question from Longmore breaks the stillness with startling abruptness—a question whose solid prose sends all the fairy, external poetry of the moment to the winds.

“Is the report now current in Rome a true one, Miss Dormer? Is an exceedingly gay wedding to take place at the British Embassy the end of this week?”

Joyce colours violently.

“‘Exceedingly gay’ is a strong expression. All wedding rejoicings are, to my mind, mistakes. But one must go with the crowd. I

need not say, Mr. Longmore, that I and my mother would wish to see you among our guests on Saturday."

"Mrs. Dormer did not look to-night as though she would wish to see me anywhere. . . . Naturally enough," adds Longmore, after a moment's embarrassed hesitation. "Mrs. Dormer guesses, doubtless, that I passed through Nice on my way to Rome. The sight of me may have awakened tragic remembrances that were better allowed to slumber."

As he speaks—yes, before his words are fairly uttered—a suspicion, horribly intense, even in its dimness, has shot through Joyce's brain.

"What dark mystery is this you hint at, Mr. Longmore? Do you know more than you care to say to me, openly? What tragic reminiscences has my poor little mother? How can it concern her that you happened to pass through Nice on your road to Italy?"

"Simply because Nice lies close to Monte

Carlo, that men's tongues have not ceased speaking. . . . Miss Dormer, if you insist"—for she has drawn close, in her agony of fear has rested her hand upon his arm. She looks up with piteous eagerness in his face—"if you insist upon the truth, men speak still of the misfortune of a very old friend of yours."

"Go on; I am in the dark. You torture me by your slowness. Do you mean that mamma can have tragic reminiscences of—of——?"

But here speech fails her. Joyce Dormer's white and trembling lips will not shape themselves into uttering Roger's name.

"Of Mr. Tryan," says Longmore quietly. "There can be no need, surely, to enlarge upon the subject. I hint only," he adds, "at that which the whole world knows—the unhappy quarrel into which Roger Tryan was forced with a certain notorious Count Zecca, twenty-four hours before Mrs. and Miss Dormer quitted Nice."

CHAPTER XIV.

ESCAPE.

DURING some seconds of time Joyce is speechless ; her hand, rigidly clasped on young Hugh Longmore's arm, trembles not. All she can realise is—that the external world has grown dark and narrow around her ; that she has been deceived ; that if Tryan be *dead*, she will seek out his grave, press her lips to the cold earth that covers him, and so, peacefully die, and be with him, and away from John Farintyre (in this supremest moment she can think of that)—away from John Farintyre for evermore !

“If you would have the kindness to tell

me all you know." So, at length, she speaks—can these indistinct, husky accents be Joyce Dormer's? "The news, you see, has come a little suddenly. Mamma must have kept things back from me, for the best, of course. My mother could only have acted for the best—she is over-watchful, she exaggerates my weakness! But I am quite strong. I can bear more than mamma would think. I ask, Mr. Longmore, to be told all you know."

Is she acting a part, with finished delicacy, throughout, or is this nature? Flying to the extreme of scepticism, after the manner of most very young men in whom belief has been newly shattered, Longmore, for a few more mistaken minutes, believes her to be acting. Poor in purse, insignificant in position, he, Hugh Longmore, is still a quondam worshipper, and Joyce Dormer will not show in her true colours, in her unwomanly heartlessness, before him.

The goddess would fain remain on her pedestal, the coquette retain her hold upon her victim's respect, to the last.

"I know no more, Miss Dormer, than what the idle Nice world commonly talks of. Two English ladies, friends, in his palmier days, of poor Tryan's, went over to Monte Carlo one evening in January last—prompted, who shall say by what caprice? After watching the play for a while the younger of the ladies was seen to leave the rooms on Tryan's arm. What had gone before, the exact circumstances which brought him into a quarrel with Zecca, are unknown—it might be juster to say, are known only to the principal actors in the drama. The facts that followed were such as all the gossiping tongues in Nice could neither add to nor gainsay. Count Zecca is a shamefully notorious duellist. You have heard his sobriquet, of course? 'The Monte Carlo Fitzgerald.'"

A stifled assent bursts from the girl's over-charged heart.

"A gentleman whose hands are as clever in the use of the sword or pistol as in the packing of cards or cogging of dice. A scoundrel," says Longmore hotly, "down to the ground! Well, it was a boast of Count Zecca's that he got over his affairs 'of honour,' quickly, liked to send his challenge and have his man neatly finished within the twelve hours. He did so now. Soon after sunrise next morning Roger Tryan was Quixotic enough to give this professional murderer a meeting. They exchanged shots just outside the territory of Monte Carlo. Tryan fired in the air. Count Zecca took his usual scientific aim . . . and his victim fell! That, I believe," the words are spoken with emphasis, "was the day before Mrs. Dormer and yourself started for Rome."

Joyce is colourless as the marble pillar at her side. Abandoning Longmore's arm, she

stands with hands clenched, with features shrunk and livid. No sound passes her pale lips. Tears, the capacity of ever shedding tears again, seem frozen in her horror-stricken, dilated eyes.

With a strained, automatic gasp, speech at length escapes her.

"I am rightly punished—my first falseness has borne its fruit! And to think that I never went to him, never wrote a word, I who . . . ah, if I had known, if I had not been cruelly deceived, do you suppose," cries Joyce, with an impulse of fierce self-disdain, "that I should be here, dressed as I am, merry-making, dancing?"

Impossible to doubt the white anguish of her face, her voice's passionate despair.

"It was not my place to speak to you of this," cries Longmore, moved almost to compunction. "If wrong has been committed, it is irrevocable. The past is past."

"But the future—do you tell me *that* cannot be changed?" Joyce asks wildly. "Am I not—God be thanked—my own mistress still? Oh, I see things clearly now," she exclaims, as remembrance after remembrance, each in itself a moral proof, crowd on her excited brain: her dream in Pisa, the voice from the dead that has for ever pursued her in Rome, the spectre face at the Sistine chapel: all the symptoms of nervous instability that quinine and iron were to set right. "I have had warnings enough, and I turned from them. I have allowed myself, like a fool, to be lead blindfold, and now—Mr. Longmore, have pity on me! Do not say that the past is past, that a wrong, however great, may not be undone!"

She stretches forth her hands, she totters an uncertain step or two in the direction of the ballroom; then colonnade and garden, and outlines of sleeping Rome, whirl round before Joyce's sight; the fountain is silent;

horns and fiddles and bassoons cease to play. The timely support of her companion's arm alone keeps her from falling.

Longmore leads, almost carries, the girl to a low stone bench in the outer air. He steepers her handkerchief in the cool water of the basin and presses it to her forehead.

"I did not know I was so weak." So, as she rallies from her swoon, Joyce begins to murmur. "Weak, at the moment when I need strength as I never needed it before!"

"Your absence will not have been noticed, Miss Dormer. Rest here until your faintness passes, and when you return to the ball-room——"

"I shall go away from this place and from Rome," she exclaims, rising with a convulsed effort to her feet. "A train leaves for the North at daybreak, and I shall start by it. Yes, I mean to leave my mother and all of them, to go where, perhaps, I may still be of

a little use. You will help me, will you not? I look to you, Mr. Longmore, as to the one person in Rome who can befriend me. You will help me to start upon my journey, if—ah heaven,” she cries, her voice sinking under the terror of the thought, “if it be not too late!”

The moment is critical. As Joyce Dormer’s stern, self-elected judge, young Longmore knew that every approach to his heart was frozen. In this altered, dangerous post of consoler he finds his stoicism melting like snow beneath an April sun.

“It is not too late,” he answers, under his breath. “Roger Tryan lives.” For a second it seems as though Joyce would fall upon his neck at the tidings. “More than this, Roger Tryan had progressed so far along the road to recovery that, a week ago, he left Nice, against the doctor’s advice, for Rome.”

“For Rome?” she echoes, with a return

of natural colour, with tears at last softening the wild horror of her eyes. "Roger Tryan is here, and you have been all this time breaking the news to me. He is stronger—well, then, is getting back his strength? I shall be able to see him to-morrow, early? Oh, Mr. Longmore, answer me. If you knew how terrible it is to be kept in this uncertainty."

And Longmore obeys: strengthening the story he has to tell by no cruel, unnecessary detail, but extenuating nothing, tinting nothing in rose-colour. On the first day after his arrival in Nice it chanced that the late Monte Carlo scandal was discussed among a party of Englishmen at the table d'hôte. From their talk Longmore gathered that Zecca, immediately after the duel, had taken flight—it was supposed had joined a certain Major and Mrs. Pinto, in Corsica; that Roger Tryan, still weak from his wound, was staying, alone

and untended, on an upper floor of this very hotel. Longmore's window opened upon a terrace where the invalid was accustomed to walk feebly to and fro in the morning sun. By the end of four and twenty hours an acquaintance was struck up between them, and——

“Ah, I can imagine the rest!” cries Joyce, a crimson flush overspreading her excited face. “In his weakness, his loneliness, you became Roger Tryan's friend! You heard from his own lips the history of that miserable quarrel and its cause. You heard how mamma and I left Nice. No wonder you had learned to hate, to despise me! No wonder you almost refused to hold out your hand when we met to-night.”

“Do not make me more ashamed than I feel already, Miss Dormer, of my own barbarism. From Roger Tryan I heard less of his affairs than from every other person to whom I spoke in the hotel. Once, I know,

on my pressing him, he said that the cause of the duel was a stupid collision that took place beside the trente-et-quarante table, a collision that a fire-eater like Zecca was safe to construe into insult. 'If I had had a grain of sense,' said poor Tryan, in that pleasant, half-jesting voice of his—you remember it?"

Yes, Joyce Dormer remembers.

" 'I should have started for Paris, England, anywhere beyond the Monaco territory, as soon as I saw what mess I had fallen into. But I have been consistently unwise all my life,' Tryan added. 'I remained, and, while Count Zecca's sense of honour is satisfied, have no worse crime than folly resting on my conscience.'"

"And he made no allusion to us? Roger Tryan never spoke to you of our conduct?"

"The names of Mrs. Dormer and yourself were first mentioned by me, the day before I left. Then——"

“You need not revise your words, Mr. Longmore. Then?”

“I told Tryan that I had an object in reaching Rome by an early date. I also told him—on the authority of a paragraph in Galignani—that the marriage of John Farintyre and Miss Joyce Dormer was fixed for the Saturday in Easter week.”

Joyce moves a restless pace or two away. She looks forth, with blank, unnoticing gaze, upon the dusky orange groves, the panorama of leaden gray domes and roofs and cupolas that lies beyond.

“And that evening, half-an-hour after I had spoken to him of you, Tryan announced his resolve of travelling on to Italy, at once. It was useless to talk of prudence,—useless for the surgeon to command. He wanted Southern air and sunshine, wanted to get away from all the sorry associations of his illness and of Monte Carlo. In a word, Miss

Dormer, he wanted to reach Rome as many days as might be before the Saturday in Easter week! To order an invalid coupé, to see that he travelled with a minimum of risk and fatigue, was all Roger Tryan's friends could do for him."

"And he arrived in Rome—when?"

As she asks this, a pang of cruellest compunction goes through Joyce Dormer's heart. Must not Roger, ill in spirit and body, have watched her during the driving and sight-seeing of the last busy fortnight. Must he not have seen her in the Borghese gardens, on the Pincian Hill, in all the gayest haunts of Rome, untroubled, to outward seeming, by regret or remorse, with John Farintyre by her side?

"Mr. Tryan reached Rome the middle of last week. He travelled direct. I took the longer route by Florence. If all had gone well, the plan was that we should meet here,

at the Hotel Washington, on the night of Easter Monday."

"If! Speak to me of things as they are, not as they prettily might have been," cries Joyce, with the impatience of a woman whose heart prophesies some evil thing she shrinks from hearing. "What do you mean by 'if'? You followed Mr. Tryan to Rome—you found him making progress, stronger for the change? Oh, it is cruel, cruel to keep me in such suspense! It is impossible that you can have any further ill news to tell me."

Longmore turns his eyes away in pity from her face.

"I have to tell the truth, by your own command," he answers, "and the truth is that Roger Tryan does not make progress. He bore the journey well—so much I have gathered from some of the English-speaking people at the Washington—but once in Rome refused to put himself in the doctor's hands, or to

take the commonest care as to his hours of going out or coming in. You must know the dangers of Roman night air, Miss Dormer, even for persons in health. To a man weak from recent loss of blood——”

“Be quicker!” she exclaims, with a gesture of agonised impatience. “Let me know the worst you have to tell.”

“Roger Tryan went on Friday to the service at the Sistine Chapel.”

Where Joyce saw him: no hallucination of the anæmic brain, but her old lover in the flesh; her old lover—haggard, hollow-eyed, as he watched her at the side of the lover of to-day!

“He came back to his hotel, faint and worn-out, towards midnight, and next morning was down with malarial fever. The poor fellow is well looked after. Dr. Byrne, one of the first Roman physicians, visits him. He is nursed by a Sister of the Bon Se-

cours. But his strength, Miss Dormer, is not good."

"I understand you. Go on."

"If we could learn the address of his relations in England . . . Dr. Byrne thinks some one belonging to him should be telegraphed for at once."

"Some one belonging to him!" Joyce Dormer repeats the words mechanically. She stands, as though numbed by the violence of this final blow. The lamplight falls in waves of roseate light upon her silks and laces, upon the jewels in her hair. Tinkle tinkle go the violins and horns to which the gay Roman world is dancing—the gay Roman world, bidden next Saturday to the celebrating of her own wedding-feast!

After a long silence she turns slowly round towards Longmore. She rests a hand that no longer trembles on his arm.

"Will you do something very good-natured

for me, Mr. Longmore? Help me to get back, with as little notice as may be, through the ballroom. I am going at once home to my mother's lodging, and then on to Mr. Tryan's hotel. I must see his nurse, find out—rather late in the day, but never mind that—if I can be of use.”

“I am afraid you can do little for him, dear Miss Dormer,” says Longmore, with grave kindness. “The landlord of the Washington, frightened out of his wits, like all these Romans, at the thought of their own fever, had the poor fellow carried at once to a lodging. He is quiet there, the doctor says, and well nursed. You would only run useless risk by going to him—doubtful, indeed, if Tryan is any longer in a condition to recognise you.”

“I shall recognise him,” Joyce Dormer answers, simply, calmly, as though they discussed some matter of everyday interest. “As to risk—even supposing Roman fever

to be contagious—is life so sweet that one should set a miserly store by it? No, Mr. Longmore, no.” She adds this with a shadowy reflection of a smile. “I may not even have the consolation, now or hereafter, of imagining myself a heroine. I am commonplace, as I have always been, through and through.”

Longmore gives her his arm without another word. A tumultous galop is just now in course of execution; and the din of the dance-music, the sea of whirling human fantoccini, come to Joyce’s aid. Unseen of watchful mother or jealous sweetheart, they tide safely through the ballroom into harbour of a vestibule, a dimly-lit retreat, where only a few engrossed, unobservant couples are whispering in exotic-bowered corners. A short space more, three or four apartments quickly passed through, and escape—Joyce’s overstrained heart beats freer at the thought—is assured.

CHAPTER XV.

THROUGH ROME AT MIDNIGHT.

"HERE, then, Miss Dormer, I will wait for you," says Longmore, when they reach the bottom of the central staircase. "Or, while you go to the cloak-room for your wraps, shall I see what prospect there is of finding a carriage outside?"

"I need no wraps," Joyce answers firmly. "My mother is in possession of the cloak-room ticket, and I will not leave your arm, Mr. Longmore, or run the chance of delay, now that I have got so far. Night air? Oh, I am proof against it. Surely you remember enough of our Chillon adventures to know that cold and wet do not harm me!"

And then, attracting looks of blank wonder from such lacqueys, gentlemen's gentlemen, and other idlers as chance to be hanging about the entrance door, they walk forth together, Lochinvar fashion, into the open air.

No charger stands near. Not a vehicle, public or private, is to be seen.

The earliest carriages are ordered to be in the Piazza Barberini at one o'clock; and it is not yet midnight. The sky has grown blacker during the past ten minutes. The wind is sharp; charged, too, with a campagna mist, fast turning into a steady downpour of rain. And Joyce is in satin and gauze. Her arms are bare to the shoulder, her throat is uncovered. Ere she has taken a dozen steps, her training skirts, her silken dancing shoes, are soddened through by the wet and defilement of the Roman pavement.

Turn back? Nay. After the ballroom's heat it must do them both good to breathe

this quickened air. Such is her answer to young Hugh Longmore's expostulations. The rain, the cold, the absence of human faces, are a refreshment. Turn back for shelter—send a servant for a carriage? No, a thousand times no. Who can tell, her voice trembling with excitement as she speaks, what even five minutes' loss of time might involve?

And, clinging fast to Longmore's arm, gathering her ruined ballroom draperies round her as best she can, Joyce struggles on.

They make their way along the Piazza Barberini, as heedless of the weather as of the *per Baccho!* that proceeds from every cloaked and muffled Roman who comes across them in the darkness, then, turning short to the right, strike into the Via Felice, and so obliquely gain the Trinità di Monti. From the Trinità they must run—wade, rather—across the flooded Piazza di Spagna, the rain, by this time, rushing as only Roman rain can, down

all the hills and sloping roofs of the city. A few minutes later—thirty yards of a narrow, lava-paved street swiftly traversed, a portiere rudely wakened from his sleep—and they are ascending the tumble-down marble steps of the palazzo in which Mrs. Dormer lodges.

Silence reigns throughout the building; a solitary oil lamp burns in the entrance hall. On reaching the third floor, Hugh Longmore, at Joyce's bidding, hammers with muscle upon the sixteenth century knocker which serves for the different suites of apartments on the loggia, calling forth by his blows a very legion of echoes from all quarters of the palazzo. After a time, chinks of light stream through a neighbouring hinge; a frightened "lor bless me!" is breathed, in unmistakable British accents, from out a half-opened door. And then Mistress Smart, the fine, newly-hired London waiting-woman, enters upon the scene.

Need I describe how that waiting-woman's

brow elevates at the spectacle presented to her! Miss Joyce Dormer, her mistress, in posse, sans hood or mantle, with brilliant Parisian braveries limp and dishevelled, with satin shoes the colour of the streets; a young man (not Mr. Farintyre) in evening attire, white-tied, lavender-gloved, a man, also bare-headed, and also limp and dishevelled, for Miss Joyce Dormer's sole escort!

Smart has waited ere this in families dating from the Conqueror. When the necessity of an abigail first became manifest, it was Mrs. Dormer's harmless pride to secure one direct—yes, with the very bloom on—from the stormy service of the just buried old Countess of Wendover. Smart has perused many unwritten editions of the lives of the great. She knows that queer family discussions arise, even among persons of Norman blood; is broken in to more duties than those of hair-dressing and millinery; has learned when to speak, when

to be silent. The present experience is new to her. Never, in Smart's recollections, was the great eleventh commandment so openly set at nought. Never did the most dramatically rebellious heroine perambulate city roads, cold, wet, bare-headed, in dancing slippers, with insufficient chaperonage, at midnight.

The proprieties are outraged. With elevated brow, Smart purrs forth respectful surprise—semi-admonitory.

“Miss Dormer — ma'am! which I hope nothing serious has happened to your mamma, or ——”

“Nothing serious has happened to my mamma, or to any one,” Joyce cuts her on the instant, short. Then turning hurriedly to Longmore: “It seems forced upon me always to treat you with scanty ceremony,” the girl whispers. “That night in Clarens when I owed my life to your courage I left you—about as drenched as you are now—outside

the door of my mother's room. I am about to show my usual gratitude, ask you to sally forth again into the wet and darkness of the streets."

"I know. I understand exactly what you mean," is Longmore's answer. "You wish me to go back, straight to the Palazzo Orsini, break the bad news to Mrs. Dormer and Farintyre, then——"

"I wish you, while I am putting on my cloak and hat, to look for a vettura. Afterwards, I shall ask you to drive with me to Roger Tryan's lodging. You know the address?"

"Dr. Byrne wrote it down before I left him." Longmore takes a card from his breast-pocket and reads aloud: "Seventy-three, Via Nono, a small street close to the Monte Giordano!"

"We have not a moment to lose. Turn to your right on leaving the house, and the next bend of the street will bring you into the

Corso. Even in this weather, at this hour, conveyances of some kind are likely to be passing there."

A shake of the hand is exchanged between them; a mute ratification of their almost forfeited friendship. Then, Hugh Longmore's figure having vanished down the black well of staircase, Joyce takes a chamber-lamp from Smart's agitated clasp, and makes her way through the salon to her own room.

True daughter of Eve, she flies, even in this hour's agony, to her looking-glass. With a mingled feeling, partly horror, partly compassion, she examines the image her looking-glass presents to her.

Joyce Dormer—by the world called a spoiler of men's peace, an empress over men's hearts: *this*, then, is what an hour's remorse, a ballroom repentance, a little bodily cold and tiredness, have brought her to! Which of her suitors, she thinks, with the spirit of self-

torture that at such moments trenches so nearly upon humour—which of her suitors would be faithful if he could see her now ?

For her beauty—at all times the perfection of grace, expression, youthful winsomeness, rather than of feature—is, in truth, beauty to fade, as it blossoms, in a breath. At this moment, the oval of her face drawn and exaggerated, her blue eyes wide and pale, her lips bloodless, her delicate hair soddened by the rain, Joyce Dormer looks a spectre, a wreck of her old self (there is bitter-sweetness in the feeling), on which any one who knew her formerly must look with aversion, however much that aversion were tempered with pity.

What a contrast to her moral despair, her physical uncomeliness, are the heaps of costly toys, fresh from jeweller and modiste, with which her room is strewn ; the livery of the bondage into which she had so nearly sold

herself, and that was to have been paid for, next Saturday—at the price, only, of a human soul.

Next Saturday. . . .

With feverish haste Joyce Dormer exchanges silken trains, Parisian furbelows, for a close-fitting black stuff gown—chosen, you may be sure, from Joyce Dormer's modest wardrobe, not from the overflowing trousseau of the future bride. Then she gathers together every present of worth that she has forced herself to accept from John Farintyre, makes them into a parcel, which she directs to him, and leaves conspicuously placed on the centre of her dressing-table. And then, mastering her repugnance for the task with strenuous effort, she brings her hand to write a few words of farewell to Mrs. Dormer. Words of wild rebellion—twenty-one years of love, reverence, duty, turned suddenly to madness! Words such as, I hope, few of us

who have children will ever merit should be written to ourselves !

Reverence. Has Mrs. Dormer revered *her* best, because her most natural, human feeling ? Duty. Was it dutiful to let her believe Roger Tryan untrue, to let her flaunt her heartlessness as a virtue, show herself publicly before men's gaze with Farintyre, at the very time when Roger Tryan's voice, in its last fluttering anguish, might be vainly calling on her name ?

"I have heard the truth, mother. I understand the paragraph in the newspaper, the dream I had in Pisa, as you must have understood both, at the time. And I am doing that which you and I, together, ought to have done in Nice. I am going as a nurse to Roger Tryan, to-night. He followed us to Rome last week. You knew that also, of course ? You knew that it was Roger's face, not a phantom of my own brain, that I saw in the

Sistine Chapel ? Perhaps you have not heard that he has been struck down by Roman fever, is alone, dying. I must ask you to give Mr. Farintyre back his presents, and say that everything from this hour is over between us.

“How am I to forgive the wrong that has been done to Roger and to me ? There is no forgiveness—only hardness and despair in my heart.

JOYCE.”

When the bedroom door, at length, opens, and Joyce Dormer walks forth, storm-clad, in sombre hat and veil, ready for her enterprise, Mrs. Smart, who, in the interval, has kept discreet vigil beside the key-hole, fairly starts from her post.

“You are looking shockingly pale, ma’am, and the weather grows worse and worse. Mr. Farintyre’s courier have told me that these cut-throat foreign places are never safe after midnight—I do trust, Miss Dormer, you have no intentions of venturing out ?”

Smart is a tall, upright woman, of juvenile middle age. Her voice is pitched at a constant and suggestive stage whisper; her manner of folding her hands is sleek; her eyes do not permit themselves the liberty of looking higher than her interlocutor's chin. Aggressive respectability, the very pink of Servants' Hall Philistinism, reside in her Oxford Street mob-cap, in her Oxford Street brooch and chain, in every bristling fold of her Oxford Street black silk dress.

Joyce shrinks, like one mortally struck, from the tone of unctuous remonstrance. This woman's presence brings before her all that in her soul's passionate revolt it is death to remember—money, jewels, milliners, marriage-settlements, travelling cases, and the name that was to have been hers, till the grave should part her from it, next Saturday.

“I am sure, ma'am, Mr. Farintyre would

be apprehensive—Mrs. Dormer would not think it prudent for you to venture out——”

So, with suave intonation, Smart is once more beginning.

“Mr. Farintyre’s apprehensions will soon lessen,” interrupts Joyce, a queer, frozen sort of smile upon her lips, “and Mrs. Dormer knows my liking for bad weather! I have been summoned to attend a friend who lies, here in Rome, sick unto death. You will repeat that, if you please, when they return. My mother, I have no doubt, missed me from the ballroom, and Mr. Farintyre will be likely to bring her home. Say, simply, that I have been called to the bedside of a dying friend, and give mamma a note and parcel that you will find upon my dressing-table.”

“If it is your wish that I should accompany you, Miss Dormer, I will do so, of course. I was sent out here in the dark, as one may say—the agency offices are *that* inaccurate!”

The woman glances round, with a sniff of disapproval, at Mrs. Dormer's artistic salon—a barely-furnished vault, as seen by Smart's London-trained eyes; scagliolo floor, majolica tiles, cinque cento carving, and nineteenth century cobwebs, all valued together at zero. "I never thought that duties out of the ordinary would be required of me. Still, if a fellow-creature is lying ill, I hope I know my Christian obligations. In the Earl of Wendenover's service, our chaplain used to say . . ."

Joyce turns away with a scarce-suppressed movement of impatience. Hastily pushing open the salon door, she crosses a tiled corridor that runs along the entire length of the third storey; then, bending over the worm-eaten oaken balustrade, gazes down into the darkness of the stairs, and listens intently.

No sound save the vague moans and creakings of old age is to be heard throughout the palazzo. Not a footfall disturbs the quiet of

the narrow street outside. The city's very heart seems sleeping fast. Abruptly, as Joyce waits, her brain on fire, her pulses beating fever-quick, one o'clock—proclaimed, clear and ghostly, from three hundred Roman church-tongues—brings home to her the need of instant action. One is the hour for which their carriage was ordered at the Palazzo Orsini. Another ten minutes, and Mrs. Dormer may be here; cool, collected, *unscrupulous*, thinks Joyce, with harsh, newly-awakened bitterness, as to the nature of a coup d'état, so long as the coup promise success, and lie conveniently near at hand.

Joyce Dormer turns sick at the thought. She resolves, desperately, to start on foot, alone, in search of Tryan's lodging in that unknown and distant Via Nono. Her hand has grasped the wall-rope; she is just nerving herself to brave the dusky abyss of staircase when the sound of wheels comes, with a rush,

along the uneven lava pavement of the Strada della Croce. The wheels stop, the outer bell is pulled vigorously. There follows a brief silence—the portiere once more reluctantly shuffling off the coil of sleep; then the street door's rusty hinges give a groan, and young Hugh Longmore, three steps at a time, runs up the stair.

“I have been successful, Miss Dormer—by a minglement of bribes and threats have turned aside a vettura on its way to the Orsini ball. But you must not lose a moment,” Longmore adds breathlessly. “The driver, as far as I can make out his Italian, declares that he will give me possession for half-an-hour, at the longest. Are you ready?”

“Ready—ay, long ago.”

Joyce Dormer's answer is given promptly; but Joyce herself does not move. She clasps her hands, with a gesture of pained uncertainty, across her forehead.

"Something has been forgotten, Mr. Longmore. Something that I ought to do is left undone. Wait for me a little moment," she exclaims. "Let me try to collect my thoughts."

The waiting-woman upon this draws near, her step dignified, her face melting in the direction of humanity.

"Was there anything I could get for you, ma'am? A *hextra* shawl, perhaps—an umbrella? Or"—alas, poor Smart, making, according to her lights, a last clutch at the sacred ensigns of sham!—"would you wish me to accompany you and—and this gentleman?"

For several seconds longer Joyce stands in the same attitude of stunned bewilderment. At length a look of relief passes across her ashen face.

"I have remembered. Go down quickly, Mr. Longmore. Take forcible possession of the vettura and wait for me. I shall be at the house door almost as soon as you are."

She turns back, and for a minute or two searches in the darkened salon. Then such fraction of a soul as Smart possesses is further shaken by a new experience. Her young mistress, the rich Mrs. Farintyre of the future, not content with going forth, poorly dressed, on a questionable errand of mercy at midnight, but must carry "that shabby old fiddle of hers," in its shabbier case, between her arms!

Even Longmore is conscious of a certain shock when Joyce comes down the stairs to him thus laden. He is seized by a sense of the incongruous — a sense which, to young readers of human motive, turns the pathetic ever with such fatal ease to bathos!

"I see what duty was left undone. The ruling passion, Miss Dormer, strong in death. Nero played while Rome burned."

But Joyce is too merged in the reality of pain to be jealous over possible misinterpretation of her conduct.

“Have you forgotten that I am bound by a promise? Did I not tell you once, in Clarens, from whom my violin came, and how? I have promised never to part from Stradiuarius while I live. Judge if I could be guilty of breaking my word to-night.”

They enter the vettura as she speaks: disjointed expostulations still audible from Smart, who, lamp in hand, is following them down the staircase. Then the conduttore, with a shake of the reins, urges his dripping horses into a gallop, and away over the stones, the rattle of the wheels echoing weirdly along the narrow street, the fugitives start.

Small margin, in truth, was there for irresolution or delay. As they rush round the first corner with a swing the vettura narrowly escapes collision with an English-looking, pseudo-private brougham, returning at decorous pace from the direction of the Palazzo Orsini. The light from a neigh-

bouring street-lamp flickers upon the near window of the brougham and displays the figure of a lady seated inside in evening dress. Another instant, both conduttori having brought their horses to a standstill, and Joyce recognises her mother, calm, sweet, youthful-looking, in a white opera-cloak, and with the most bewitching little rose-lined hood above her head.

A silhouette of John Farintyre, with lowering brow and set lip, is discernible in the shadow at Mrs. Dormer's side.

CHAPTER XVI.

ROGER TRYAN'S LODGING.

A FEELING almost of ecstasy thrills through Joyce's miserable heart.

She is free, at least; has escaped *that* bondage; will never blush again for Farintyre's want of brain; never listen to his praises of Rosie Lascelles, of the Ambiguity, be wounded by his pride of purse, humiliated by his gorgeous gifts. With the ready grasp of detail which is at once the crown and the curse of over-imaginative people, she falls to conjuring up each successive external item of the position; pictures the scene that, ere another quarter strikes, will be at its height in the salon of her mother's apartment; listens

to Smart as, upright and rustling, that majestic personage answers under a cross-fire of questioning. "Gone! Yes, indeed, ma'am, notwithstanding all that she, Smart, could urge, in one of these hack carriages, with only a young gentleman for company. Summoned to the bedside of a dear friend, sick unto death." Upon this melodramatic part of the story the woman would be sure to dwell. "And here are a packet and a letter, Miss Dormer solemnly bade her deliver. In the Earl of Wendover's service, ma'am, our chaplain used to say . . ."

Joyce sees his own discarded jewels in Farintyre's big hands, shivers at his outburst of rage, watches the expression of Mrs. Dormer's lips as, courteous, self-possessed (Joyce can never think of her mother otherwise than thus), she clothes the situation in such poor robes of platitude as come within reach. For ether there is neither place nor

scope. Ether is a weapon of attack ; belongs to a time when concession from strong antagonists may still be possible. But, though one fall, it shall be with grace ! The Farintyre money will still exist as a power in the world, notwithstanding a madcap daughter's rejection of it. Let us part from the owner of money with a dewy eyelash, with murmured hopes of meeting under happier auspices—if Mr. Farintyre can show fine spirit, *generosity* enough, to accept one, still, as an acquaintance ?

What, according to doll moralities, is the fate of wedding presents when weddings are broken off ? Joyce asks herself this as the carriage rushes on through the pitchy night, amidst increasing wind and rain. To what mysterious limbo will go the smelling-bottles, Dresden plates, travelling-clocks, fans, laces, brackets, Japanese monsters, Shakespeares and church services that have been so lavishly poured in since the day when Mrs. Dormer

officially announced that her daughter was to marry the rich Mr. Farintyre?

Costly food, costlier raiment go not, with intention, to the bottom of the sea, though hearts be shipwrecked. Who, eventually, will eat the London wedding-cake, and wear the Paris wedding-dress? Who will countermand the bouquets, the carriages, the guests, the officiating clerks, and make Mr. Dormer happy by telling him he may rest quiet among his teapots, in Naples? Who will give the lady's-maid warning—for her mother and herself must, perforce, resume their old habits of nomadism, need an abigail less than ever, after the fruitless expenditure of the last few weeks—who will give the lofty Smart warning, and in what terms?

She wonders, without pain, almost as one might idly speculate on the concerns of some indifferent person, if she will live to see John Farintyre in the years to come: see him, per-

haps, when she is an elderly, faded woman, no particular hope distinguishing one of her colourless days from another, and he shall have grown into a senior partner, bald, prosperous, with wife and children, a seat in the House of Commons, an authoritative voice, and gout !

Should she die, happier contingency, now, when she has taken her last watch beside Roger Tryan, she knows the very spot on the cypress-covered slope of the Campo Santo where she would like to lie. A spot not so far from the violets of Keats's grave but that the Pyramid of Cestus, at a certain hour of the day, overshadows it. Would they bury her, here in Rome, at Tryan's side, or part her from him, in death as in life ? Part her from him, doubtless ; recall with a sigh how, poor dear girl, she was never really strong, talk about thin shoes . . . imprudence . . . a chill resulting from the maddest ballroom freak . . .

erect a marble falsehood, neatly, above her head, in some English cemetery, and forget her. Six months hence Mrs. Dormer will be wearing slighter mourning; other hands, obedient, perhaps, to the impulse of some young and happy heart, shall woo soft delight from the strings of Stradiuarius, and . . .

And the vettura pulls up short, midway along its course down a steep and narrow lane. Joyce is forced to remember that she is *living*, must drink her cup to the dregs ere vision so sweet as this of lying under violeted sod be indulged in.

“Via Nono, seventy-three,” repeats Longmore, looking sceptically forth into the darkness as he opens the carriage door. “Whether our guide has played us false, whether this be the Via Nono or not, I am afraid, Miss Dormer, you have no choice but to brave the weather. It was part of the bargain that we should keep the vettura for one course only, and that the

driver should not wait a second. Let me get out, first—search, at least, for shelter.”

Shelter, however, is not forthcoming. In blackest obscurity, the rain beating fiercely in her face, Joyce finds herself once more on rough, wet pavement, young Longmore and the driver trying to outshout the wind (must not men be paid, must not men resent overcharge, though one at hand lie dying?) as they settle how many lire shall be paid for the half-hour's drive. With the departure of the *vet-tura*, the position seems to grow forlorn. Joyce is familiar with all the main Roman thoroughfares, and, as her eyes gradually grow used to the darkness, she can distinguish one or two landmarks of the neighbouring Monte Giordano. But how feel sure that this is the Via Nono? How make out poor Tryan's lodging amidst the rows of towering, unlighted houses which stretch out in vague perspective on either side?

“Via Nono, seventy-three.” No lottery-ticket-holder, breathlessly waiting to hear *his* number called, could experience heart-beats more poignant than does Joyce as, clinging to Longmore’s arm, she deciphers number after number on the crumbling, weatherbeaten lintels above the doors! At length, the girl’s limbs failing her for very weariness, further search all but given up in despair, “73,” roughly chalked upon a ground-floor shutter, catches her sight. The house to which this shutter belongs is a ruinous, many-storeyed building, upon the first floor of which one solitary window gives sign of human presence. The rickety outer partone stands ajar. An oil lamp, burning beneath a Madonna on the opposite side of the street, feebly illuminates the entrance. When the partone is pushed open, the balustrade of a staircase can be guessed at, rather than distinguished, through the gloom.

"Here we part, then," whispers Joyce, Hugh Longmore having given a muffled ring at the house-bell. "I am safe in shelter, and you—ah, Mr. Longmore," she breaks off with quick remorse, "it is the old story still. I have behaved selfishly throughout the whole of our acquaintance. I am selfish, thinking only of myself, to the end."

"Thinking only of yourself, Miss Dormer?"

Their hands have met, exchange the pressure of a silent farewell. Hugh Longmore strains his eyes to catch a last impression of the face whose haunting fairness, during all these months, has been his paradise and his torment.

"Yes, thinking of my own trouble, forgetting that you were wet to the skin and would be stranded, without guide or conveyance, among these deserted Roman lanes. But for helping me to find the number you might have returned to your hotel in the carriage,

might have been spared the misery of another soaking."

The water, of a truth, runs in streams down the young Oxonian's drenched evening suit.

"When one is wet, one is wet," he remarks laconically. "Fate seems to have decreed that whenever you and I, Miss Dormer, are thrown into each other's society we should come to grief——"

"In the matter of weather, not in other things," Joyce interrupts him, with emphasis.

Hugh Longmore dares not trust himself sufficiently to answer her.

"I, of course, have come to the last grief of all. Every hope of my life is over—only one frail plank still left to founder, and then . . . absolute shipwreck."

"Many a frail plank has ridden out storm and tempest before this."

Longmore's voice betrays him, although the tenor of his words is reassuring.

"Not such a storm as this," Joyce answers tremblingly. "You, however, need not be bracketed with me in misfortune. When you go from Rome I hope all troublous thoughts will be left behind you, buried here."

"When I go from Rome I shall carry away—not hope," exclaims Longmore passionately, "but a higher ideal than I ever had! In the last two hours I have regained more than I had lost. It is not a time, I know," he adds, "to speak of personal feelings—of keenest regret, bitterest disappointment. I am a spectator at a drama that moves me utterly, but a spectator only."

"And you will not be the worse—as time goes on, you will not feel less interest in your life, less pleasure in your work, for having known me? So much, before we part, I should like to hear you say."

Frankly the poor girl presses his hand, frankly upholds her white, agitated face to


his. But Longmore misunderstands Joyce Dormer, suspects her of coquetry no more.

The solution of the problem, the interpretation of a woman's heart, have, tardily, dawned upon him!

"I shall be better, richer, until I die for having loved you," he whispers, his pent-up secret wrung from him in the moment's strong emotion. "Every past hour that I have spent with you has been pure gain, gold, without a mixture of dross! And as for the future——"

In a moment Joyce has gone back to the remembrance of Tryan, the horror of her own overshadowing dread.

"Do not let us talk like this. There is no future for me," she exclaims wildly. "If a brighter day ever dawns for Roger Tryan I will write. Rest assured I shall keep my word this time! Then I will thank you as I cannot do now for your generous help to both of us. Mr. Longmore—good-bye."



Even as she speaks the word, a mysterious little door opens in the farther corner of the entrance yard. A minute later, a nondescript slippered figure, lamp in hand, has made its way through the darkness, and in the soft patois of the Roman peasant people, announces itself as the portiere of the establishment.

“An Inglese!” This is in answer to Joyce Dormer’s flurried, barely intelligible questions. “Yes, an Inglese moriente lies—worse fortune to the house—on the first floor. Ahi, ahi. It is a case of bad fever, lasci che Io le dica! Best leave the povero to the saints and to the Buona Sorella who nurses him. Nay, then, if the signorina choose, she shall have the sick man’s door pointed out to her. Ahi, ahi. These Protestant Inglese mind neither death nor heaven.”

For a second longer Joyce’s ice-cold hand presses Longmore’s, her breath lingers, as once it did, among the lonely mountains, in the

placid summer moonlight, on his cheek. Then a girlish, black-clad figure flits across the courtyard's floor, the sound of a light foot-step dies away, is lost among the echoes of the staircase. The vividest chapter of Hugh Longmore's life is closed with a clasp.

CHAPTER XVII.

DEAD VIOLETS.

A TRAGIC un-ornamented fact, brought abruptly face to face with one's own conscience. Refined reader, do you know the moral shock engendered by such a process?

Joyce Dormer, during her twenty-one years, has, by virtue of the artistic temperament, lived much; has thought, has felt more than the average of young women; has loved, has suffered. And still, thoughts, feelings, sufferings, have, perforce, been trivialised by a certain influence. Serious, persistent frivolity, sweet smiling disbelief like Mrs. Dormer's tend to lay young enthusiasm in the dust quite as effectually, I suspect, as did the orthodox

method of preaching down a daughter's heart, in vogue, thirty years ago.

When the door of Tryan's sick-room opens, when the portress, invoking all calendar saints, collectively, has crossed herself, and fled down the stairs, Joyce Dormer stands alone. Alone, unpropped by chaperon or convention, in the presence of truth, the issues of life or of death marshalled in sternest array before her eyes. Alone with the man whose happiness pretty little feminine aspirations and caprices ruined long ago, and who, racked by fever and weakness, calls now upon the name of Nessie Pinto, now upon her own, in the plain, unanswerable sincerity of delirium.

In this moment Joyce Dormer becomes a woman, forsakes the Doll tribe with its low ambitions, its cold desires, its easy sliding scale of cheap moralities, for evermore.

The room where Tryan lies is bare and

mouldering. The windows, in accordance with Roman ideas of nursing, are fast closed. Medicine bottles, mixed up with the remains of an Italian supper—*id est*, oil, fish-bones, and garlic—stand on a table, not a couple of yards distant from the sick man's pillow.

In an opposite corner of the room, bolt upright, sits an aged sister of the Bon Secours. A rosary, half told, is slipping from between her thin brown fingers. Her head is supported by the wall; her mouth is open. The sister of the Bon Secours sleeps, audibly.

“Dell’ acqua! Datemi dell’ acqua,” moans poor Tryan, in hoarse, broken Italian. “Why, Pinto, I say, where’s Nessie—where’s your wife? Can’t she give up Monte Carlo for one night? Send a servant, then—don’t leave me to die of thirst, alone. Water—one of you—for the love of heaven—water!”

Hastily laying aside her hat and cloak, Joyce crosses to the bed, and takes her place

by Roger Tryan. A jug of water stands on a table close at hand. She pours some into a cup, and supporting the sick man's head with her arm—the arm that was to have been Roger's rightful pillow two years ago—raises it to his lips.

He drinks, in short greedy gulps; then as he is in the act of swallowing, falls back, heavily. His staring, over-bright eyes meet Joyce's very full.

"Who are you — what are you doing here?" he cries. "Nessie, I say, Nessie Pinto, send this German girl away. She has come here to poison me, send her away! I want," his voice changing almost to a moan, "I want to see Joyce Dormer before I die. Oh, I understand—you are afraid to let her come. Jealousy, this wretched jealousy to the last. My poor little darling . . . with her pure face . . . and her eyes. Shall I never again see her eyes this side the grave?"

"She is here, Roger; she is waiting for you to forgive her."

"Don't you know that Kriloff has the deal? Rien ne va plus. Le jeu est fait . . . rouge gagne, et couleur. The same bad luck as ever. . . . No good, you say, Madame, in pulling up? Then double the stakes—follow out your system. As well be ruined in one night as take a year about it."

He stops, and looks round him, wildly. Joyce shrinks not for a moment. Her pitying clasp does but hold him closer.

"Whose arm is this?" he rambles on, presently. "Whose face is hanging over me here in this miserable place? . . . Take her away—quick! I won't have the German woman near me. Mrs. Pinto, you have been my friend through thick and thin, truer—you are right in that,—than a hundred Joyce Dormers."

A shudder of pain runs through the slight frame that upholds him.

"But I loved her, fickle though she was . . . and now . . . that I am dying . . . you keep her from me. Give me water!" He cries this with piteous impatience, and clutching the bed-clothes between his pale hands. "For the sake of heaven, water!"

Again Joyce lifts the cup to Roger Tryan's lips, her arm supporting his head. Again his eyes rest, this time with something more of reasonable recognition in their gaze, upon her face.

"Are you the girl I used to go about with at Cowes?" he asks, catching such firm hold of her wrist that, for a second, Joyce Dormer's courage well-nigh fails her. "Where is your husband? What are you doing here in my room?"

"I am Joyce," she answers, bending over him, tenderly. "I have no husband, Roger. I love no one in the world but you. You are very ill. You are away from all your

friends, and I—have come here to your lodging to nurse you.”

At the sound of her voice Roger Tryan for a moment or two looks bewildered ; the wildness in his eyes softens. Then, bursting into a loud, jarring laugh, he loosens his hold upon her.

“No husband! You will say next, no lover. A pretty story to tell me after all that is past and gone. Why, there was Sir Kenneth Grant—old enough to be my poor darling’s father, but approved by Mrs. Dormer for all that! And now there is this fellow with the big fortune. I saw them together on the Pincian, in the Borghese gardens, at the Sistine Chapel. What do they call him? Tell me quick—don’t torture me—the man out of the city—their marriage is fixed for Saturday—you know him as well as I do!”


Sick and trembling, Joyce brings her lips to speak John Farintyre’s name.

“Farintyre, that’s it! ‘A fellow almost damned in a fair wife.’ There they are—standing together in the crowd. Let the priests put out their tapers and chant their psalms. Miserere . . . miserere . . . such a marriage cries aloud for pity, both from God and man. Do you see her there, I say—Joyce Dormer, at Farintyre’s side, smiling?”

“Joyce Dormer will never smile again in this world,” says the girl, as he seems to pause for her answer.

“She does not know I am watching. She thinks me safe, a dying man, away there in Nice. Dead men tell no tales, my poor child, do they? Troublesome, you see, for a married woman to come across an old lover, an out-at-elbows spendthrift like Roger Tryan. And Joyce is prudent, there you show judgment, Mrs. Pinto, prudent—a heart of ice——”

“No, Roger! She loves you. We will



put the past away, and hope for good days yet. Joyce Dormer loves you."

"Prudent, like her mother, knows the market value of things. . . . Why, when the Frenchman had winged me, never to call, never to write me a single word . . . The quarrel was not about her," he breaks off confusedly; "Joyce Dormer's name shall not be mixed up in a paltry card dispute . . . See, your luck again, Madame! Tout va aux billets. L'or va à la masse. Rien ne va plus. Oh heavens, stop it all—turn off this gas, and give me air. I suffocate."

Joyce Dormer crosses the room; without awakening the fast-slumbering nurse, she opens a chink of window: then softly gets back to her place beside Tryan's pillow.

"That is right," moans the poor fellow, as a breath of fresher air crosses his face. "We are better off here, Joyce, among the orange trees than hanging over that wretched green

cloth, are we not? Dix huit coups de tiers et tout, et une série de cinq. If your wife goes on like this, Pinto, we shall be ruined, both of us. No man's purse would last out such play. Make her wait for a new dealer—or ask some one else to stake. Ask Joyce Dormer? No, I say, no. She shall never put down a napoleon. It is not a place for the girl. What brought her to Monte Carlo at all . . . at Zecca's side, too! A thousand pardons, M. le Comte, but—well, then, Monsieur, if your friend insists on taking things seriously, it *was* meant as a hint, an affront if you like the word better, and I'll abide the consequences . . . Wounded? Oh, a scratch, a flesh wound, only. Bid Gervais see me home . . . Keep the thing out of the papers if you can, and tell the Frenchman to run. I've done a good bit of work, Pinto, though you would not stand by me . . . cleared Monte Carlo of that scoundrel."

So, incoherently, Tryan's mind wanders ;


recollections of light and of darkness, of orange-scented gardens and croupiers' cries, of Joyce Dormer and of his own quarrel with Zecca, poured forth together, in loud and ever-heightening delirium. At length, worn out, he falls into a broken, troubled sleep, and Joyce is free to move, faint of spirit, yet upheld by the feeling of infinite bodily strength that the weakest of us, in such dread hours, have experienced.

Quitting her place beside the bed, she applies herself to the needed task of making the sick-room neat. The girl has an inborn faculty for nursing; a gift, I have remarked, not unfrequent in women who are also born artists. Her step and her touch are quiet, her dress is unrustling, her sense of hearing keen, her nerve steady. She bears away the sister's garlic-haunted supper-dishes into an adjoining chamber, and skilfully adjusts the opening of windows in such a fashion that air without

draught shall vitalise the patient's oxygen-craving blood. Then, noiseless and swift, she sets herself to arranging the chaos of minor disorder that a week's Italian sick-nursing has sufficed to bring about—medicine phials, glasses, spoons, carafes, crowded in unlovely array upon the time-blackened ledge that serves for mantelshef, cupboard, and dressing-table above the fireplace.

In doing this, it chances that Joyce comes across a small heap of Roger Tryan's personal belongings, laid away, doubtless, by the honest sister on her first arrival in the lodging. His watch and chain are here, together with the locket that once held a bit of his betrothed's hair, a pair of sleeve-links—his real or playfully feigned attachment to which used many a time to arouse Joyce's jealousy—a signet ring, a bunch of long-dead violets.

Dare she guess as to the colour of the hair that lies enclosed, now, within that locket?



Dare she wonder of whom these violets are a remembrance ?

Alas, what matters it ! So answers her chill and sinking heart. Of what account are falsehood or fidelity to one who nears the goal whither Tryan is hastening, who treads the dark road where no human love can bear us company, no human coldness harm us more !

Dead violets. With an impulse of repentant tenderness, Joyce lifts them to her mouth. She cares not for whose sake Tryan first valued them. Enough, that they have been his ! With muffled tread she moves a step or two closer to the night-lamp, and examines the little bunch of dried stalks and sapless petals more nearly.

They are the violets she dropped on the terrace at Monte Carlo ; are tied together by a shred of crimson filoselle.

Roger Tryan's sleep lasts for the best part

of an hour. When he awakens it is with somewhat quieted nerves, with a look of freshened consciousness on his features.

"Water, give me water!" Does a fever patient ever wake with any other cry? "Dell' acqua, buona Sorella, datemi dell' acqua."

The Buona Sorella sleeps, professionally calm, through everything. But Joyce, on the instant, is at his pillow; she raises Roger's head: with gentle strength supporting his weight, she gives him to drink as before.

He looks at her, when she has laid him back on his pillow, with a face, sunken though it be, that is like the beloved face she remembers, with eyes no longer unknowing.

"I dreamed that you were here, Joyce. Your mother and Mr. Farintyre could not keep you away, my dear, could they?"

"No one could have kept me away," she falters. "I heard first of your illness at a ball, to-night, from Hugh Longmore. In a

moment I felt that I might be of help to you, and I came."

"You did not come very quick in Nice after my misadventure with the Frenchman."

"I never knew of your danger. The whole story was cruelly hidden from me. Do you think," she cries, "after what was said between us that night at Monte Carlo, after I had asked you to call on my mother next day, that I should break faith with you again?"

"It was a near thing—did Longmore tell you? Monsieur Zecca's bullet went considerably nearer one's lungs than the surgeons liked. However, we won't talk of past misfortune now. Things are looking up for me." A wan smile breaking over his face, as he speaks. "For I have got you! How long are you going to stay with me, Joyce?"

"As long as you will have me," she answers; then sinks upon her knees at his

side. "I will never leave you more, dear Roger, unless you wish it."

Roger stretches out his arm around her shoulder, drawing her towards him, with such poor strength as he still possesses.

"Of course. I know what that means. Farintyre generously spares you for a little time because I am going to die. I overhear more than they think—the end approaches. The old English doctor who visits me said as much to-day to the Sorella."

A cry of exceeding bitterness breaks from Joyce Dormer's convulsed lips.

"Oh, my dear, live for me! I have loved you always—yes, when the world, when you, Roger, must have thought me falsest. Only I was a coward, I did not dare stand up against Lady Joan and against my mother. But I have loved you always. I have never forgotten you for an hour."

"And you don't mean to marry Farintyre?"



Mrs. Dormer will consent, after all, to your accepting poverty? Nay, we will leave doubtful subjects alone. We will talk only of ourselves. Do you remember the first night I saw you, Miss Dormer, at the opera? Minnie Hauk was playing Carmen. The bull-fighter had just sung his song. And I looked round from my stall, and saw your yellow locks close above me in one of the boxes."

"And at the end of the act you came in with Mr. Armitage to be introduced to us. You did not leave our box for the remainder of the evening, Roger."

"And as I took you to the carriage, you gave me a list of your coming balls, you promised me dances for them all. Well, well, 'tis over now, operas, balls, everything—but the time that followed was the best time of my life."

"And of mine," adds Joyce humbly "I remember each of those dances as if it had

taken place yesterday. I keep my programmes still. I read your name, written on them from end to end."

"You gave me dances, but I had plenty of rivals, all the same."

How cheerfully they talk—cheerfully, though with every stroke of the clock, Roger Tryan's strength ebbs, and Joyce's miserable heart comes nigher to breaking.

"You took care I should not be too sure of my fate until the hour came. Do you remember that hour, Joyce?"

"Remember!"

And at the thought a glow of warm and passionate life overcomes the pallor of Joyce Dormer's face.

"It was in Richmond Park. We were taking an after-dinner walk, and had the misfortune, somehow, to lose Mrs. Dormer and the others! You were bent, you said, on finding white foxgloves that evening, so we were

forced to go deep away among the woods. The sun was setting, and . . . did I, or did I not, really make you a declaration, Joyce?"

"You always said not," she answers, resting her soft hand on his forehead. "And so, Roger, as we certainly were engaged when we drove back to town, I suppose the declaration must have come from me."

"My poor little sweetheart! It was a bad evening's work for you, anyway. You might have married some richer fellow even than Farintyre but for that Richmond dinner."

"Thank God I have married no one," is Joyce's firm answer. "Thank God I am free to kneel at your side, to hold your hand, as I do now."

"Free to watch by me till death us do part," says Roger, but with his utterance once more growing indistinct. "There is something like that in the marriage service, is there not?"

"Till death us do part."

Joyce Dormer's lips can frame no answer save the husky repetition of his words.

"Well, then, although we have had no priest's blessing, you will stay with me . . . until all this dream is over. For I *am* dreaming." And he shrinks from her, the restless fire of delirium again lighting up his eyes. "Faites votre jeu, Messieurs, le jeu est fait. Rien ne va plus! Why is it so dark? Are they turning off the gas already? It was not dark like this at Monte Carlo."

"You are in Rome, quietly alone with me, Roger. Let us never speak or think of Monte Carlo more."

"There's Nessie Pinto at the foot of the bed, in black—a small bit of hypocrisy, Madame, that black gown of yours—Nessie Pinto and her husband. What! You have brought my cheque-book, Pinto, all the way to Rome. You have not forgotten that, though you forgot to stand by me the other day? You

want a trifling loan—the old story—my signature, merely, for another hundred? Then make your wife take an oath—Nessie's oaths—to give up play. *Rouge gagne et couleur*. Lost, again. Don't you see the Russian croupier dealing? When did you ever have luck in one of Krilof's deals?"

So, through the lagging night hours, Tryan rambles darkly on. At length, just when the crystal-clear light of Roman dawn is breaking, sleep falls upon him. After a brief interval he opens his eyes, and, very quietly, calls Joyce by name.

"I am here," she answers, bending over him instantly. "Are you suffering? Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Kiss me, my poor little girl. Let me feel your lips once again this side the grave."

And Joyce obeys him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STRADIUARIUS.

EASTER, this year, has fallen unusually late. The southern summer draws on with rapid, flower-strewn steps. By each express that leaves the Eternal City the English-speaking Roman colony disperses to the winds.

The month of May is the fairest, possibly the wholesomest, season of the Roman calendar, We Britons must fly north or south, nevertheless. Did not Somebody, long ago, decree that English persons of fashion must *never* spend their Mays in Rome? When nightingales sing and roses blow, and the Romans begin to eat delicious little ices and take siestas in the shade, is it not imperative upon

every unit in the great army of Nobodies to pack up his portmanteau, pay his hotel bill, and fly.

Out of the crowd of persons who elbowed each other during the ceremonies of the Holy Week, scarce half-a-dozen, by the end of another fortnight, remain. John Farintyre, with brand-new valet, brand-new travelling-gear, and a great number of bracelets and necklaces upon his hands, started for London on the morrow of the Orsini ball. A not un-authentic whisper has floated Romeward, that bracelets, necklaces, and Mr. John Farintyre himself, are already offered to the lawful acceptance of Rosie Lascelles, of the Ambiguity. Hugh Longmore is keeping his last term in Oxford. Little Mrs. Dormer, with implacable resignation, has offered herself up to the world's view—a martyr! Little Mrs. Dormer, after some years' delay on the road, has at length overtaken her husband and his teapots at Naples.

“My child’s behaviour under late trying circumstances was simply magnificent.” This she tells her Naples friends, a tear, pellucid as truth, glistening on her eyelash. “Joyce is a born nurse, at the call of pity would sacrifice even her own nearest interests. Under brighter circumstances Mr. Tryan’s amiable qualities had endeared him to us. In the dark hour, when fair-weather friends all fled, my daughter nobly risked her life to tend him. Joyce’s conduct has been magnificent. *I*, alas! have felt my heart torn asunder by conflicting duties. Personal fear one, of course, has none. A nervous invalid like my dear Mr. Dormer must be guarded from the possibility of contagion. And so, for a while, her nursing cares fortunately brought to an end by the patient’s convalescence, Joyce must resign herself to lingering on in Rome in quarantine.”

Will you visit her in this “quarantine,”

reader, see in what haven Joyce Dormer's overwrought heart and brain have found rest?

You must ascend a narrow road close beside the Arch of Titus if you would do so, ring at a convent door above which: *BONUM EST NOS HIC ESSE*: is graven in mouldering capitals, and deliver your message, show your credentials, to a sombre-robed, cheerful-faced portress, one of the lay members of the sisterhood, who will appear behind the barred grille in answer to your ring.

Here, among a community of Little Sisters of the Poor, on a site which in Rome of old was the garden of Adonis, Joyce Dormer has sought and found refuge. In her first outburst of passionate repentance, of just indignation, all that the girl could realise was—that she had been deceived;—that Roger Tryan, helpless, forsaken, needed her succour! On the night of the Orsini ball she went to his sick pillow as a daughter would go to a dying

father, a sister to a brother. She took her place, day and night, beside the nurses, quitted him not in his extremest need, ministered to him, divinely patient, throughout his slow, oftentimes doubtful, return to convalescence.

Only when convalescence had fairly set in, on a certain morning when the doctor, drawing her aside, remarked triumphantly that their patient was returning to *life*, did Joyce realise what thing it was that she had done. Over shattered doll moralities she mourned not. But Roger himself . . . Agony lay in the thought that her imprudence might lower her in his sight, for whom she would have counted the world and the world's opinion well lost. And in a paroxysm of new-born shame, with burning cheek and stammering tongue, she besought the kindly English doctor to be her guide. Mrs. Dormer, drawn, as we have seen, by the cords of wifely duty, was at this very moment preparing to start

for Naples. Lawful protector in Rome Joyce, on her mother's departure, would have none. And yet to Rome, as long as Roger remained there an invalid, she found herself bound.

“Mr. Tryan might have a relapse. It was well for her to be at hand in case the nurses of the Bon Secours should need her help. But she would like to go away—to-day—this morning—from Mr. Tryan's lodging. Her strength was shaken a little, perhaps, through loss of sleep. Or it might be that this early summer weather tried one's northern nerves. It would be good for her to move to a different part of Rome; good to rest. If Dr. Byrne could only advise her as to a fitting resting-place?”

As the poor girl asked this, faltering, blushing, it scarcely needed forty years' professional experience to arrive at a diagnosis of her case. Gravely resting his fingers on Joyce's wrist, the good old doctor pronounced

change of air to be an instant necessity : two hours later—a plaintive written consent wrung, meanwhile, from Mrs. Dormer—drove with her himself to the door of the little Sisters of the Poor. Sisters in very truth, gentle souls, whom no Roman heats can drive from their cloisters and their prayers ; simple women, ready ever to offer sanctuary to the lonely or the sorrow-stricken, to the poor of spirit as to the poor of purse !

From that day, on, Joyce Dormer's health of mind has made steady progress. Exactly the profound quiet that we need after seasons of large joy or large grief the sleepy daily round of this convent life has yielded her. She is as truly making a "retreat" as though orthodox confessor listened to her searchings of conscience, and saintly director guided her hours.

How if she had grown enamoured in earnest of gray convent walls, if, taking

example by the sisters, she had weaned herself from all old desire of mundane achievement? What chance had there been for a soul like hers in an existence as void of human ambition as of human love?

Resting within the pergola—a rose-embowered, orange-shaded pathway of the convent garden—Joyce ponders closely over these questions, one dreamy noontide. A cloistered life, she bethinks her, could not be such a very bad lot, here, in Rome, with the memories, the poetry, of all the ages around, a tapestry of sun-kissed flowers clothing the walls of one's prison-house, and the ever-young Italian sky above. Not a bad kind of moral suicide, if no voice in far-away England called to one, if no vacant chair beside an English hearth were the price of one's euthanasia!

Even as she muses thus, her thoughts become dramatised, unconsciously. A Song

without Words is ready to break from Joyce's heart. In fancy she can see some pallid English sister, standing amidst the mingled orange blooms and cypress shades of the convent garden. A rosary is between the sister's thin hands, a mechanical prayer on her rigid lips, and in her breast . . . yearnings for warm household love that she shall never taste, of duties, sweet, trebly sweet, in their daily commonness, which she has forfeited for ever.

If Stradiuarius were only at hand, how naturally the pathetic story would set itself to music! Joyce rises from her seat. Wistfully gazing across strong walls and iron-barred gates, she thinks of her violin lying disused, in its case, in Roger Tryan's lodging. In imagination her fingers know the delightful, familiar sensation of polished bow and vibrating strings. She hears Rogers' voice while, half tenderly, half jesting, as in the days long dead, he criticises her improvisa-

tion. As she stands thus, her cheeks a little pale, her eyes suffused under the influence of thought that bids fair to become emotion, a solid footstep crunches along the path that leads from the convent buildings to the pergola, a black-robed figure approaches—no pining, passionate Heloïse, but good, thirteen-stone Monica, the porteress, contentment and good cheer writ large on every feature of her handsome old Roman face.

Another few seconds, and a slip of folded paper is in Joyce's hand.

“Doctor Byrne and a friend would be glad of ten minutes' conversation with Miss Dormer in the convent parlour.”

Her past fortnight among the Little Sisters has been one of unalloyed good to Joyce; a calm breathing-space upon which, from out the wear and tear of fuller-coloured life, it may well be that she shall look back, hereafter, with a feeling of regret. None the

less does she obey Dr. Byrne's summons with over-ready steps, with a flush of most mundane tell-tale expectation on her face. Through dim orange-scented pergola, through noontide blazing sun, she flies to the quadrangle, a marble-paved space where at this moment the sisters, two and two, pace slowly under shadow of the cloisters. She traverses the long cool convent passages; she reaches the threshold of the parlour. Then, pausing for a second to get back her breath, Joyce pushes back the half-opened door, hastily, and discovers Roger Tryan, alone.

"I—I beg your pardon—I thought Doctor Byrne was here."

So she falters, growing guiltily red, and stopping short on the entrance.

"Doctor Byrne has gone on to visit a patient in the next street," says Roger, coming forward to meet her. "He has promised me ten minutes' grace—ten minutes, Miss Dormer,

to say all that has still to be said between you and me! Why have you not been to see me for so long?"

Roger has, by this time, shut the door; and Joyce makes her escape into the remotest window of the room, an iron-barred window, festooned by trailing vine branches, and with an outlook through vistas of Judas trees in bloom, towards a delicately purple sweep of Alban hills.

Garden and hills and blossoming trees are at rest. The whole world, it would appear, save one caged canary singing far away in the refectory, is purposely silent. The whitewashed walls seem prepared to listen. A row of water-colour sisters send down cold glances of admonition from their black bead frames overhead. The motionless repose of Southern midday is upon all things.

Joyce Dormer's colour varies; her heart throbs loud and fast.

"I knew you were making good progress, Mr. Tryan. If there was any relapse Doctor Byrne and the Buona Sorella promised to send for me. That was a settled thing when I left your lodging."

"How long is it since you left—months, years? I used to think being ill was slow work," says the poor fellow, whose face still wears the pinched and sunken look of recent fever. "But I have learned, since you gave me up, that there can be one thing in a man's life slower still—convalescence."

"'Gave you up!' You gave me up after the best of all fashions, Mr. Tryan—by recovering. I stayed as long as the doctor ordered, as long as it was possible you could want me."

"You think so. And suppose I had wanted you to stay for ever?"

The question is a crucial one. Joyce Dormer buries her face amidst the tangle of warm leaves that frames the window.

"Are not the sisters fortunate in their garden? Were such delicious roses ever seen?" she remarks irrelevantly. "And look at the deep shade of our pergola. I don't for my part see, with such a garden as this, why one could not remain in Rome right through the summer."

"And be buried under the cypress, yonder, with the first autumn rains. I perceive, Miss Dormer," says Tryan, "that the Little Sisters of the Poor are getting hold of you. You are beginning to hanker after a convent life. Doctor Byrne hinted at such a likelihood as we drove along. The sisters are bent on making an English convert."

"The kind, simple sisters! I am afraid they know too well that I am of the world, worldly, to attempt my conversion."

"And you have no leaning towards the embroidering of altar laces, the trimming of saints' lamps—no intention of spending the

remainder of your days within four well-barred walls?"

Mr. Tryan is standing at the distance of about one foot and a half from Joyce as he asks this question. Ere she answers, she lifts her blue eyes to his face; they peruse it tenderly, not without a secret dread.

"You do not return to strength as quickly as you ought, Roger. The hair has gone from your temples. Your cheeks are hollowed. Your whole face has that terrible gray shade of illness about it still."

"And you, Miss Dormer," he answers, "have got back your best looks. Your cheeks never bloomed so sweetly before, I think. Evidently, you are not wasting away. The Little Sisters of the Poor do not starve you."

His tone is jesting. Joyce turns from him with a quick movement of disappointment.

"I do not pretend to waste away. Why

should I? Have I not everything in the world," her lip quivers, "to make me happy?"

"And you are going to remain in Rome, among cypress shades, and saints' pictures, and malaria, for the summer?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Out of idle curiosity. Under Doctor Byrne's orders I have decided to go north next week."

A flush like day-dawn stains Joyce Dormer's face from chin to temple, then leaves it pale.

"Doctor Byrne has ordered you to the north—well, Mr. Tryan, I am glad."

"You are frank, at least, Miss Dormer!"

"Glad for your own sake. You have nothing in Rome to regret."

"That is true," Roger Tryan answers cheerfully. "I shall leave nothing behind me in Rome, I *hope*, worth regretting. By the by, Miss Dormer, instruct me as to what


I am to do with your Stradiuarius? Such a thing as profane music was of course never heard, since Saint Cecilia's days, in a convent. Shall I keep your violin until I can give it back to you in a fitter place and season?"

At this question, at the coolness of voice with which the question is asked, Joyce Dormer's spirit sinks to zero.

"Stradiuarius will be more wanted by me than ever," she answers, with a trembling attempt at lightness. "I have not told you about my ambitious plans for the future—indeed, I was uncertain myself if they could be carried out until I got a written approval from poor mamma. A Naples letter arrived, two days ago, however, and——"

"Bad news is coming!" interrupts Roger Tryan. "If my name was mentioned in the Naples letter I prepare for the worst."

"Do not be afraid, Mr. Tryan. The letter is full of quite commonplace business. My



mother has gone through so much trouble about me," adds Joyce penitentially, "that I had scarce courage at first to break open the seal. Happily, everything is settled. I have her consent and my father's also to my wishes."

"Which are . . . ?"

"To study violin-playing for three years at the Stuttgart Conservatorium, not as an amateur, but professionally."

Upon hearing this news Roger Tryan, for a little space, stands mute. Then he puts his hand to his breast and draws forth a bunch of violets, pale of hue, scentless, as violets must be upon whose petals a Roman May sun has shone.

"Do you remember the violets you dropped on a certain terrace at Monte Carlo, just before Mrs. Dormer and the poet overtook us? I kept them—have you forgotten?—promising to give you some fresher ones next day. But next day, to me, was a blank."

Joyce shudders, although Tryan's arm by this time holds her close.

"And now, here in Rome, I have been held prisoner by my illness. However, I have brought you your violets, at last—poor ones, for the violet season is over. What thanks do you give me?"

"I would to heaven I had never gone to Monte Carlo," cries Joyce passionately, and, taking the violets, she lifts them to her lips. "That foolish fancy has been the cause of all your troubles."

"If you had not gone to Monte Carlo I might be losing money there still—supposing that, by this time, I had a napoleon left to lose! If you had not gone to Monte Carlo you might have married Mr. Farintyre weeks ago," says Tryan, "in which case you may be sure I should have brought you no violets, faded or otherwise. Joyce, my dear," he resumes after a pause, the water-colour

sisters looking sterner and sterner, the canary in the refectory singing his loudest—is it fancy on Joyce's part that his song takes the minor key with the superfluous second of Carmen!—"I don't approve of this Stuttgart plan; I am wholly against violin-playing as a profession for young women of your age."

"But by the time I had finished with Stuttgart I should be in my five-and-twentieth year," says Joyce, vainly endeavouring to steady her voice. "I am of age now, old enough, as poor mamma says, to know my own mind and choose for myself——"

"Does Mrs. Dormer say that?" exclaims Roger Tryan. "Well, then, I second her. I say, choose! Joyce," he pleads, in a low and eager whisper, "are you going to turn from me for the sake of crotchets and semiquavers, and gaining yourself a famous name in art? Your nursing saved my life. Make the life you saved worth living—marry me."

Through yonder break amidst the cypress gleams a stretch of the Coliseum's crumbling, grass-grown arches. Nearer at hand lies the Via Sacra, the road along which Roman legions once poured forth to victory, where Cæsar walked abroad in purple, where Horace loitered, where Corinne and Oswald loved! And overhead is the sky of Italian summer, and birds' voices trill softly to each other amidst the convent trees, and in a girl's heart are love and hope and happiness, as fresh as though Rome were in its prime.

"Poverty is a grim thing to accept when one comes to the point," says Roger Tryan, as he watches the shifting blood hues of her face. "Still, I am not so absolutely ruined, so hopelessly an idler, but that we may look for bread and cheese, even yet."

. . . "And there will be Stradiuarius," adds Joyce presently. "In the old days you used to joke about my curtseying round for

halfpence, in a spangled dress, at fairs. We must take life in earnest now. Let the future bring what it will—yes, Roger, and although I give up Stuttgart, I shall never be able to give up crotchets and semiquavers—there will be Stradiuarius.”

THE END.





